

Clouds are weather's 'signature'



By DIETER KRIEG

EDITOR'S NOTE: The weather is one of the most awesome and vital forces known to man. This is the ninth article in a continuing series of stories designed to familiarize readers with the environment.

If you think weather forecasting is tough now, how would you like to do it without clouds? Clouds are often the tell-tale sign of what's to come, and on radar screens and photographs they even offer "signatures" to professional meteorologists.

Whether it's an amateur "weatherman" such as the farmer, or the kind who's a scientist, they all need clouds to know what's going on. Granted, they'd still have a few signs to go by, but clouds are the most obvious. Without them we'd be just about lost.

Take the evening or morning skies, for example. Many times a farmer can tell what might be in store the next day by observing how the sky looks. What he sees is actually the reflection of light in particles of water vapor, dust, and other minute debris - clouds. If it weren't for clouds, he would see nothing because air - and the atmosphere - are invisible.

Farm prices compared

WASHINGTON, D.C. - The Index of Prices Received by Farmers declined one point during the month ended Sept. 15, USDA reported last week. Though prices were higher for soybeans, cotton and milk, these gains were more than offset by lower prices for cattle, hogs, potatoes, oranges and wheat.

At \$6.65 per bushel, soybeans were up 58 cents from a month earlier, \$1.33 per bushel above a year ago and the over-all-oil-bearing crops index was up nine per cent from August, 21 per cent above a year earlier. All milk sold to plants moved up 10 cents per hundredweight to \$9.85. A year ago, it stood at \$9.25 per cwt. The dairy products index was up 1/2 of one per cent from a month earlier, 6 1/2 per cent above a year ago.

Cattle prices were off 40 cents to average \$32.40 per cwt., were down \$2.90 from Aug. a year ago, they were bringing \$58.60. The meat animal index was down three per cent from Aug., 15 per cent below a year earlier. Potato prices declined 92 cents to \$3.24 per cwt. A year ago, they were at \$4.04. The over-all potato-dry bean index was off 18 per cent from Aug., 28 per cent below a year ago.

At \$2.88 per bushel, wheat was down nine cents from Aug., \$1.23 below a year ago. The over-all food grain index was down three per cent

from a month earlier, 30 per cent below Sept. 1975.

At 186, the over-all Prices Received index was 1/2 of one per cent (1 point) below Aug., seven per cent (13 points) below a year earlier. This marked the third straight month it has declined.

The Prices Paid index remained unchanged at 195 and was five per cent (9 points) above a year earlier. The ratio of Prices Received to Prices Paid declined one point to 95. A year ago, it was 107.

Under the old 1910-14 formula, Prices Received declined two points to 466. A year ago, it was 497. Prices Paid declined one point to 662. A year ago, it was at 631. And, the parity ration declined one point to 70 - its lowest point since Dec. 1971. A year ago it stood at 79.

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"Understanding clouds - how, why, when, and where they form, and what shape they take - is an important part of understanding the atmosphere," states a source at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) "Whether the vantage point is a satellite or radar or the trained eye of an observer, the emphasis is on using present knowledge of clouds to provide vital weather services, and on developing new knowledge of clouds as a part of an effort to improve our comprehension of the air ocean in which we live," NOAA spokesmen point out

Clouds mark the circulation patterns within our atmosphere - especially the troposphere or lower levels - and they therefore allow us to see what has happened and what

could happen. With the aid of satellites far out in space, and radar on the ground, in the air, and out at sea, cloud patterns can be studied to determine the birth of storms

Some types of storms and other meteorological phenomena actually have what is called a "signature." Once weather scientists detect it, they can focus their instruments on the situation and go to work in issuing precise forecasts and warnings. What makes it all possible, again, is the fact that clouds are an accumulation of particles large enough to be picked up by such electronic devices as radar, and cameras circling the globe

Clouds - they make a lot possible in observing, understanding, and forecasting weather

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