

## Drought, water deficit not over yet

HARRISBURG — Drought, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. To the weather watcher, spring rains signaled an end to the drought.

To the farmer, whose indicator is the amount of moisture in the soil, the wet topsoil stimulated crop growth and in his eyes, wiped out the drought.

But to the water supplier and the hydrologist, the drought is not over, and that means it really isn't over for any of us.

State drought response officials were concerned that the spring rains would provide only temporary relief. And that's exactly what happened, according to John McSparran, director of the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Resources' Bureau of Resources Programming. McSparran said two indicators drought watchers observe — streamflows and groundwater levels — now show the drought is continuing and could be worse this

year than last.

McSparran said, "The problem is that we began this summer with a rainfall deficit. Scattered summer showers usually do not contribute to making up that deficit."

McSparran explained streamflows in both the Susquehanna and Delaware River Basins have dropped since the end of June. Streamflows can be used as an overall indicator of water supply levels because in Pennsylvania, particularly in the summer, streams are fed by springs and seepage from groundwater reserves. Groundwater levels, according to McSparran, never recovered from last year's drought, and now cannot feed the normal amount of water into surface streams.

He said although much of the state experienced normal or above normal rainfall for several months this spring, the precipitation did not make up for the deficit ac-

cumulated last year. While not downgrading the gains from the rainfall this spring, McSparran says that full recovery did not occur.

February's heavy rainfall ran off the land, melting snow and temporarily increasing streamflows, but could not seep into the deeply frozen ground.

March normally is the time when the spring thaw and rains and melting snow create excellent conditions for renewing groundwater levels. However, this year March was a dry month.

April usually is the best month for recharging the groundwater. This year, however, small, scattered rainfalls, while improving soil moisture conditions, did little to recharge the groundwater tables.

May and June were wet months but hot weather had begun, and most of the rainfall evaporated or was used by plants.

"Whether or not the rain that

falls is stored depends on timing," McSparran explained. "If we had had our heavy rainfalls in March or April, instead of February, June and July, we would have experienced much greater recovery from the drought."

What all this means is that this spring Pennsylvania had little actual recovery from the drought, although the rainfall did keep it at arms length. Reservoirs are being drawn down because summer is a

peak water-use time, and the soil moisture content is decreasing, slowing the growth rate of crops and turning grass brown.

These factors make water conservation important at this time. McSparran advises public water suppliers and industrial water users to start monitoring their water uses carefully, because the need to stretch remaining supplies could be greater now than last year at this time.

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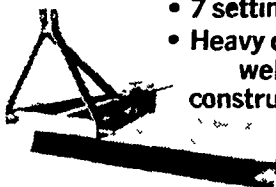
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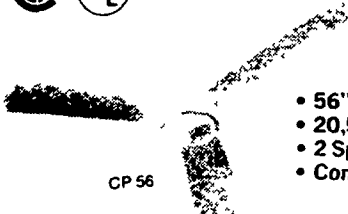


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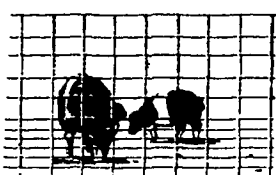
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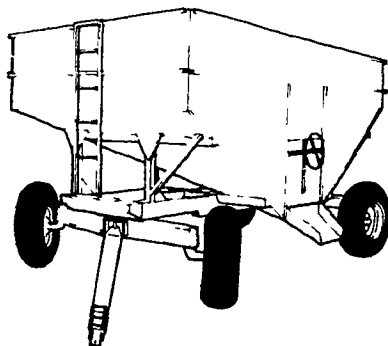
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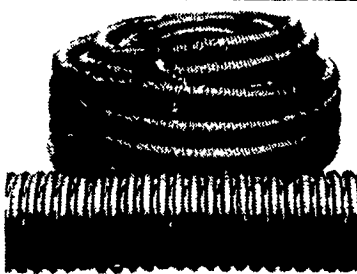
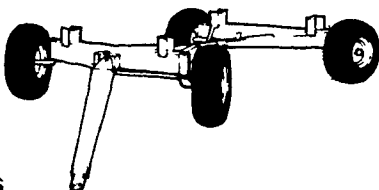


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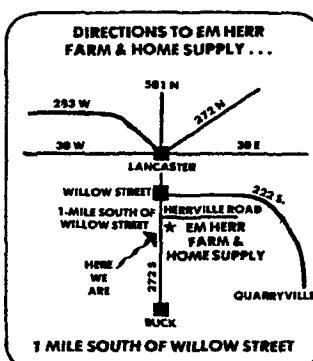
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