

# Wintry weather assails U.S.; China, Mexico dry

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Severe storms across the United States brought a mix of snow, heavy rains, high winds and tornadoes to many areas, during the first week in April according to a weekly report issued by the Joint Agricultural Weather Facility of the U.S. Departments of Commerce and Agriculture.

Dryness in China and Mexico posed further crop threats, while needed precipitation benefited crops in Spain and northwestern Africa. Showers interfered with harvest activity in some parts of South America.

Highlights of the report follow.

—United States. Heavy rain, with snow at higher elevations, fell in the West. An intense storm late in the week developed over the central Great Plains, producing locally severe weather along its path. Heavy rains, hail, high winds and tornadoes accompanied the cold front stretching from Minnesota to eastern Texas as it moved east from the Mississippi Valley to the Appalachians. Temperatures were above-average in the central regions and below average in the northern Great Plains and the West.

—USSR. Scattered light showers fell across most of the region. Many winter grain areas of the Ukraine and North Caucasus broke dormancy under low topsoil moisture conditions. If a persistent dry period extends into the growing season, the emerging crop could be adversely affected.

—Europe. Mostly dry weather continued over northern winter grains while widespread precipitation fell from France south into Spain and east across the Mediterranean. The precipitation relieved a dry spell in Spain which had persisted for

several weeks. Average temperatures were high enough to permit slow growth of winter grains in many areas.

—Mexico. Mostly dry weather over the major agricultural areas further decreased soil moisture in non-irrigated fields. Lack of rain on the southern Plateau's corn belt further delayed some planting and development of recently emerged plants. Irrigation, where available, was needed to maintain adequate soil moisture for the developing crops over most of the country, and the water drawdown for storage reservoirs was greater than usual.

—South America. Showers over eastern portions of Argentina's corn and soybean area late in the week caused temporary delays in the harvests of grain, sunflowers and first-crop soybeans. Dry conditions in Chaco favored the cotton harvest. Rainfall in Brazil was mostly light, although heavier showers interfered with harvest activity in northern Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina, eastern Parana, and much of Minas Gerais. Beneficial dryness in Mato Grosso allowed resumed soybean harvest activity, but quality may be affected by earlier, persistent rains. Brazil's soybean harvest is 25 percent complete.

—Eastern Asia. Most of China's dry area had little or no rainfall. Only half of the irrigable winter grain fields are reportedly being watered. All others remain under stress; a third seriously. Wide temperature fluctuations again occurred. Additional moisture is needed to avert serious yield declines when the crop heads in about three weeks. The Sichuan Valley also is becoming too dry. South of the Yangtze River, conditions are generally favorable for

the first rice crop. Warm, wet weather in South Korea encouraged winter grain growth.

—South Asia. Dry weather and near normal temperatures permitted harvesting in northern Pakistan and India. In Bangladesh, most crop areas had no rain. The southern tip of India

continued to receive localized rainfall.

—Northwestern Africa. Beneficial rains halted winter grain yield declines in Morocco. This moisture will allow the crop to complete the reproductive stage without further losses. Crop pro-

spects from central Algeria east remained good.

—South Africa. Warm, dry weather returned to nearly all corn-growing areas where most of the crop is now mature. Weekly coverage of this region will be discontinued until planting gets underway next autumn.

## Rural demand for electricity slows

WASHINGTON D.C. — Statistics point to a dramatic drop in the rate of rise in electricity used by rural people, causing a U.S. Department of Agriculture official to doubt the accuracy of future consumption forecasts.

"The 388 reports received thus far from rural electric systems across the nation indicate that electrical consumption grew about 1 percent in 1981, the lowest ever recorded in the 47-year history of the program," said Harold V. Hunter, administrator of USDA's Rural Electrification Administration.

This represents a big decline from the 1980 growth of 5.2 percent, Hunter said. Until now, the lowest growth rate on record was 3.4 percent in 1979.

Hunter said the figures pose major policy questions for his agency.

"Are the load forecasts being prepared by Rural Electrification Administration-financed rural electric systems accurate?" he asked. "If they are accurate today, will they remain valid next year and the year after, given the roller coaster effect of electric consumption over the last few years?"

A major concern posed by the preliminary statistics, said Hunter, is the possibility too much

generating capacity could be built years in advance of the need, saddling consumers with enormous rate increases to pay for idle or under-utilized facilities.

"On the other hand," he said, "we must recognize that there is sizeable growth in certain areas of the United States, and our agency must stand ready to provide financial assistance where necessary."

Hunter said he has instructed his staff to re-examine electrical load forecasting methods to determine whether the formulas and models used in the past are valid predictors today.


"We are working closely with organizations such as the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the Electric Power

Research Institute and the Oak Ridge National Laboratories in developing reliable load forecasting models in an effort to hone projections of electric demand more sharply," he said.

"In these times of strained money supplies, pinpoint forecasting of electrical demand is of utmost importance. Underbuilding is just as costly as overbuilding. We must make every effort to improve our forecasting methods for the sake of rural Americans."

Since 1974, the Rural Electrification Administration has guaranteed loans to rural power supply systems totaling more than \$25 billion.

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