

This Spring, Watch India To See If We'll Have A Drought

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southern hemisphere phenomenon caused by the warming of the surface of the Pacific Ocean along the equator. Thompson described his own research and findings of colleagues at a research site in Bangalore, India.

In a paper, "Impact of Global Warming and Cooling on Mid-western Agriculture," published in the "Journal of Iowa Academic Science" in 1990, Thompson spoke of the El Nino (Spanish for "the boy") as "a flip-flop of the pressure patterns on either side of the southern Pacific Ocean (Tahiti and Darwin, Australia)."

During the southern hemisphere's normal summer — our winter — the pattern of La Nina (Spanish for "little girl") dominates, with high pressure over western South America, and low pressure over Australia. However, during the period of El Nino, the patterns flip-flop, creating a situation of cool, rainy weather and low pressure patterns for the western part of South America, particularly Peru, and droughty weather in Australia and Indonesia, according to Thompson.

Jet stream

In addition, the subtropical jet stream continues to migrate northward, according to Thompson, spilling rainy, cool weather into Mexico and Texas, as has happened this winter.

Reports on the El Nino cycle date back to 1551, when church records indicated the pattern which caused a poor fish catch in Peru. Since 1973, the effects of the El Nino have been scrutinized, because "the people in Peru have been concerned about the El Nino" cycles.

The current El Nino began in October of 1991 and continues. If it continues through the growing season, Thompson said, "we'll begin to get more rain in the eastern part of the U.S. as that subtropical jet migrates further north."

Conditions appear dry and warm in India right now, and if that pattern holds up, rain could arrive in the eastern U.S. during the corn season.

El Nino before drought

"We have never had a severe drought while India is having a severe drought," he said. In most years, the El Nino occurs before the drought. "The important thing is, our droughts have occurred between El Nino events."

Thompson said if the El Nino lasts through the summer, "then I'd say the chances are very high of drought in 1993," he said. Of the 26 El Nino events since 1897, 12 major droughts have occurred, but only if the El Nino occurs in a drought cycle — as is happening now, according to Thompson.

But he said if the El Nino fades in the spring, we could experience a drought in later part of the summer, as happened in 1983. According to his records, El Ninos have occurred in 1891, 1899, 1905, 1911, 1920, 1951, 1965, 1972, 1979, and 1987 — many predating a severe drought.

Deficit state

Pennsylvania continues to operate as a "deficit state," consuming more grain than it can produce, said John Sutton, Lovatt and Company, Ambler, in his speech, "Pennsylvania Grain Markets — Unlimited Possibilities."

Sutton said that Pennsylvania



"If India is having a drought in May and June of this year, I can bet you that we'll have a more nearly normal growing season in the corn belt," said Dr. Louis M. Thompson, emeritus associate dean of agriculture at Iowa State University, at the Pennsylvania Corn Conference.



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continues to import corn from other states, including North Carolina and Canada. However, for Pennsylvania producers, there are still many opportunities for all sorts of corn products, he said.

The biggest production is Number 2 yellow corn. But producers have to put as much emphasis on marketing the crop as on producing it.

Producers should especially consider making the corn the best quality, because poor quality loads will get turned down by those who buy it.

Markets react

Sutton said that the markets react quickly to news — more quickly than before most people see it. "And when everybody says the market is going up, it probably is going down," he said.

But the importance is to get the best net return for the cash crop, which comes from a high basis and high Chicago board of trade price. (Basis is the difference between the Chicago board of trade price and the local cash price, which fluctuates every year.)

"We're blessed with mostly a positive basis in Pennsylvania," he said.

Dry weather

Sutton said this prices this year are extremely difficult to predict because of the "greater than normal possibility of dry weather," he said.

Also, the recession and the election year combine to create problems in predicting corn prices.

This year, according to figures obtained from USDA and other sources, Sutton said that if we



A high yield strategy panel (moderated by Lynn Hoffman, Penn State agronomist, far right) focused on the grower experiences of three farmers, from left, James Justice Jr., West Virginia; Daryl Alger, a Lebanon County corn grower; John McDowell, a Mercer County corn grower; and Hoffman.

plant 79 million acres, we should harvest about 71 million acres at a normal yield of 116 bushels per acre. Total crop should be about 8.236 billion bushels with a usage factor of 8.150 billion bushels.

The SPARKS forecast calls for about 78.9 million acres in 1992. Under suitable growing conditions and assuming no major upheavals, according to Sutton, prices for corn should range from \$2.55-\$2.80 per bushel (Chicago price). If we have low stocks and dry weather, the corn price could reach as high as \$3.50 or more per bushel.

High yield panel

Also at the conference, a high yield strategy panel (moderated by Lynn Hoffman, Penn State agronomist) focused on the grower experiences of three farmers — James Justice Jr., West Virginia;

Daryl Alger, a Lebanon County corn grower; and John McDowell, a Mercer County corn grower.

McDowell grows about 900 acres of corn and manages about 500 head of cattle. He explained that his operation uses a great deal of manure to build up the soil organic profile and he chisel plows to keep the ground loose. He also carefully watches soil pH levels and plants 300 acres of corn, 150 acres of beans, 70 acres of wheat, 50 acres of oats, and 200 acres of hay.

Alger is part of a four-member operation that maintains about 4,000 acres. On his own farm, Alger maintains about 180 acres and oversees two farms, including a dairy and beef cattle business. He uses mostly commercial fertilizer on his corn and does little if any tillage at planting time (compaction is a real concern, and the planter is

"the first thing to go over the ground in the spring," he said). He emphasized the use of a starter fertilizer high in phosphorous.

Justice, who placed high in many corn growers award contests, manages about 24,000 acres with farms in North Carolina, South Carolina, West Virginia, and Virginia. He said he believes in early planting and the importance of knowing the seed, seed company, and the land and what works best with it. Justice said the marketing strategy should evolve into a production strategy and emphasized the importance of using a strong placement of phosphorous and the right seed numbers for the best yield.

All the growers emphasized the need for selecting the right hybrid and continuing to test different hybrids to select the numbers that work for the farm.

PFA Head: Government Regs Erode Value Of Property Rights

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The head of a statewide farm organization called on Congress to enact legislation to protect property rights, reduce capital gains taxes and reform the Legal Services Corporation.

Keith Eckel, president of the Pennsylvania Farmers' Association (PFA), urged action during a breakfast meeting attended by Pennsylvania's Congressional delegation and about 200 farmers participating in PFA's two-way Washington Legislative Tour. The day before, the farmers had visited their congressmen for face-to-face discussions of agricultural issues.

Eckel told the lawmakers that government regulations are eroding the value of property rights. "At present it's the wetlands regulations getting the spotlight," Eckel said, "but we could point to environmental restrictions, denial of water rights, mineral rights and other economic uses of property, conservation, easements and the outright taking of property without compensation."

Eckel called for just compensation for property rights as guaranteed by the "takings" protection of the Fifth Amendment of the Constitution.

"If the value of private property is diminished by public regulation, doesn't it make sense for the public to compensate the property owner?" Eckel said, "How can we limit or eliminate the use of pri-

vate property through a public edict and expect the landowner to suffer the economic setback? If the government can't afford such action, certainly we can't ask a single citizen to carry the financial burden of the general public."

Stating that all constitutional rights are precious, Eckel said, "If we condone the loss of the rights to private ownership of property, and just compensation, what are the next Bill of Rights guarantees we are willing to sacrifice... freedom of speech?... freedom of religion?"

Turning to the issue of capital gains, Eckel said, "Lowering capital gains taxes will help all Americans, regardless of income levels."

PFA favors adjusting capital gains for inflation and reducing the capital gains tax rate from 28 percent to 15 percent.

"We talk about getting the economy moving while at the same time we tax capital when it moves from a declining enterprise to another which holds economic promise for future years," Eckel said, "Enactment of a lower capital gains tax makes good economic sense and it's fair to all concerned."

Eckel also pointed out that PFA has been urging reform of the Legal Services Corporation (LSC) for years because it has gone far beyond its purpose of providing legal aid to the poor. Started in 1974, Legal Services today coordinates

what is in effect the largest law firm in the U.S. — 6,000 attorneys and 4,000 support staff. It spends more than \$323 million in taxpayers money and \$150 million in private funds.

"Farmers seem to be a prime target of the LSC-funded migrant advocate attorneys who sue ag employers on behalf of migrant and seasonal farmworkers claiming violations of worker protection and wage laws," Eckel said. "Farm families must either expend vast financial resources defending their innocence in federal court, or settle out of court. In the latter case, evidence against the farm family in many cases is nonexistent, but they choose to settle because they can't afford the cost of protracted legal procedures."

PFA is urging passage of legislation which would prohibit LSC-funded attorneys from soliciting clients or recovering fees from private defendants and would also require positive identification of clients by name. The legislation would also prohibit LSC-funded attorneys from engaging in lobbying activities or using private funding for purposes prohibited under the LSC statute.

"The reforms are urgently needed to bring sanity into Legal Services' spending, and its activities into line with what Congress intended," Eckel told the legislators.