



US Faces Worst Drought in 56 Years

This is the VOA Special English Agriculture Report.

The United States is suffering its worst drought in almost sixty years. Moderate to extreme dry conditions spread to fifty-five percent of the continental United States in June. That was the most since December of nineteen fifty-six.

The National Climatic Data Center also says high temperatures in June added to the warmest twelve-month period on record. Recordkeeping began in eighteen ninety-five.

The drought map showed that conditions improved in the Southeast in June compared to May. But they intensified from the Midwest to the Great Plains and much of the West. Predictions through the end of October suggest that the drought is likely to improve in areas of the Southwest and Southeast. But the drought is expected to continue or intensify in large parts of the country.

Last week, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack met with President Obama. Mr. Vilsack says the drought has severely affected corn and soybean crops. The United States is the world's leading producer of maize and soybeans.

TOM VILASK: "Thirty-eight percent of our corn crop as of today is rated as poor to very poor, thirty percent of our soybeans, poor to very poor."

Most of the affected states are in the southern half of the country. But officials said farmlands in the north are now drying up as well.

The drought has pushed up prices for corn and soybeans. Both are used in food production and for animal feed. Last week the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization reported a twenty percent jump in maize and wheat prices over the past three weeks.

Wheat prices are up as hot, dry weather affects production in the Black Sea region.

In the United States, ranchers may quickly reduce the size of their herds of animals rather than pay higher feed prices to keep raising them. That increased supply of meat would reduce meat prices in the short-term. But those prices

could increase several months from now.

Mr. Vilsack said the overall effect of the drought is hard to predict. Some areas are getting rain, and drought-resistant seeds have helped crops grow well in some areas.

President Obama has cut the interest rate on disaster loans for farmers and made it easier for affected areas to receive government financial assistance. At the same time, farmers are waiting to see what Congress does with the farm bill, a major piece of legislation renewed every five years.

The Senate has passed a version that would end direct payments to farmers but help pay for crop insurance. The plan would save money. But the House of Representative has passed different legislation, and Congress needs to reach a compromise. The current farm bill ends at the end of September.

And that's the VOA Special English Agriculture Report. I'm Jim Tedder.

Contributing: Kane Farabaugh