May Weather and Crop Summary

Weather

Near-record to record rainfall soaked the northern Corn Belt, easing or eliminating long-term drought, while unfavorable dryness persisted in the southwestern Corn Belt, including southeastern Nebraska, southwestern Iowa, and northern Missouri. Mostly dry weather, accompanied by occasional extreme heat, stressed dryland crops, increased irrigation requirements, and fostered the spread of wildfires in the Southwest, Southeast (especially from eastern Louisiana to the southern Atlantic Coast), and much of the central and southern Plains. In the latter region, the heat and dryness accelerated winter wheat maturation and initial wheat harvesting. Meanwhile, late-month precipitation aided drought-stressed small grains on the northern Plains. Heavy rainfall slowed fieldwork and crop development in the Northeast, but provided significant long-term drought relief in the western Gulf Coast region (eastern Texas and western Louisiana). In northern and central California, favorably warm, dry weather followed scattered early- to mid-month showers.

A late-month heat wave gripped areas from the Southwest to the central and southern Plains, setting more than three dozen May-record highs and propelling monthly temperatures 2 to 7°F above normal. Hot weather also periodically affected the Southeast, where temperatures ranged from 2 to 5°F above normal. Monthly readings averaged 1 to 3°F above normal in the Corn Belt, aiding summer crop emergence and development. Corn Belt high temperatures at or above 90°F were largely confined to the driest southwestern areas and occurred on 5 days or fewer during May. Below-normal monthly temperatures were confined to northern New England (as much as 3°F below normal), while near-normal readings prevailed in the Northwest. Late-month heat in California's Central Valley offset the effects of several early- to mid-month cool spells, resulting in May average temperatures being within 2°F of normal.

Nationally, well over 400 daily-record highs were set during the month, more than 300 of which occurred from May 20-31. The late-month heat wave, which primarily struck areas from the Southwest to the central High Plains but also affected the Southeast, produced May-record highs in more than 30 locations from May 23-30. On the southern Plains, highs soared to 110°F in Carlsbad, NM (on May 24) and Wichita Falls, TX (on May 23 and 24). Elsewhere in western Texas, highs on the 24th reached 109°F in San Angelo, Del Rio, Abilene, and Lubbock. On May 29 in Colorado, former monthly records were eclipsed by 6°F in Grand Junction (101°F) and Durango (98°F). Also on the 29th, temperatures topped 100°F in May for the first time on record in locations such as Goodland, KS (103°F) and Burlington, CO (101°F). In the Southeast, Columbia, SC attained 101°F on May 25, just missing their monthly record (102°F on May 23, 1941) and coming within 3 days of their earliest triple-digit reading (100°F on May 22, 1941).

Less severe heat occasionally overspread areas farther to the north. Providence, RI noted their earliest heat wave (defined in southern New England as 3 consecutive days with highs at or above 90°F) on record, posting highs of 91°F on May 7, 8, and 9. Providence's previous earliest heat wave occurred from May 25-27, 1981. On May 11, Shenandoah, IA logged 98°F, the earliest observance of a high at or above 98°F in Iowa since 1994.

Dryness aggravated the effects of extreme heat in many areas. In Georgia, Macon's driest May on record (0.30 inch, or 8 percent [%] of normal) accompanied temperatures that averaged 3.3°F above normal. New Orleans, LA (May temperatures 5.3°F above normal and May rainfall 0.07 inch) and Tampa, FL (2.9°F above normal and 0.02 inch) also endured chronically hot weather in addition to May-record dryness. Elsewhere in Florida, West Palm Beach (0.40 inch, or 7% of normal) marked their driest May since 0.39 inch fell in 1967, while Tallahassee (0.16 inch, or 3%) recorded their lowest May total since only a trace fell in 1965.

Long-term precipitation deficits continued to mount in the Southeast. Through May, year-to-date rainfall was below normal by 17.35 inches in New Orleans, 16.59 inches in Tallahassee, and 10.05 inches in West Palm Beach. New Orleans' January-May rainfall totaled 7.67 inches (31% of normal), while Tampa's reached 3.11 inches (25%). Tampa's only drier start to a year occurred in 1898, when their January-May rainfall totaled 2.55 inches. Considerably longer long-term precipitation deficits, some dating to the spring of 1998, continued to affect portions of the Southeast. In South Carolina, Greenville-Spartanburg's (GSP's) May rainfall deficit of 2.23 inches left their 25-month (May 1998 - May 2000) deficit at 29.38 inches. During that period, GSP's precipitation totaled 77.58 inches, or 73% of normal. Tampa's 20-month (October 1998 - May 2000) rainfall totaled 39.22 inches (63% of normal), breaking their October 1943 - May 1945 record of 42.79 inches.

In Texas, Abilene and San Angelo experienced May-record heat. San Angelo's average monthly temperature, 81.1°F (6.9°F above normal), capped a January-May period that featured only 3.86 inches of precipitation (52% of normal). More than half (2.21 inches) of San Angelo's year-to-date total fell on May 18-19, their greatest 48-hour total since 3.88 inches fell on June 6-7, 1999. Similarly, Abilene's May heat (79.4°F, or 6.7°F above normal), compounded the effects of long-term dryness. Abilene endured 20 days of 90-degree heat during May (normal is 8 days), including 7 days with highs at or above 100°F. Meanwhile in Kansas, only 0.50 inch dampened Goodland, their second-driest May on record and driest since only 0.31 inch fell in 1927.

Highest May Average Temperature (°F)

Location	Avg.	Dep.	Former Record/Year
San Angelo, TX	81.1	+6.9	80.7 in 1996
Abilene, TX	79.4	+6.7	79.2 in 1998

Record-Low May Precipitation (Inches)

Location	Total	Normal	Former Record/Year
Tampa, FL	0.02	3.10	0.07 in 1994
New Orleans, LA	0.07	4.56	0.43 in 1998
Macon, GA	0.30	3.57	0.32 in 1956

The hot, dry, often breezy conditions across the South fostered the spread of wildfires. By month's end, the Nation's year-to-date burned acreage topped 1 million acres, an increase of more than one-quarter of a million acres from early May. According to the National Interagency Fire Center, the Southern and Southwest regions–comprised of 15 States from Arizona to the southern Atlantic Coast (Virginia to Florida)–accounted for about 850,000 acres burned from January to May, or more than 80% of the national total. One of the most severe fires charred nearly 50,000 acres in and near Los Alamos, NM.

In contrast, very wet conditions prevailed from the northern Corn Belt into the Northeast and in the western Gulf Coast region. Several locations experienced May-record wetness.