Agricultural Weather Highlights – Thursday - February 22, 2024

- In the **West**, mild, mostly dry weather has returned, following a recent spate of storms. The California Department of Water Resources indicates the average water equivalency of the **Sierra Nevada** snowpack has risen to 18 inches, about 85% of normal for late February. Meanwhile, some saturated hillsides in **southern California** remain unstable, though rain has ended. Elsewhere, trees are leafing out at a record-early pace in parts of **northern California** and the **Pacific Northwest**.

- On the **Plains**, record-setting warmth has retreated, although temperatures remain above normal for this time of year. On February 21 in **western Texas**, temperatures climbed to 85°F—highest readings on record for the date—in **Borger** and **Lubbock**. Daily records were also set on the 21st as far north as **North Dakota**, where both **Bismarck** and **Jamestown** attained 60°F. The warmth is causing wheat to prematurely lose winter hardiness, especially on the **southern Plains**.

- In the **Corn Belt**, rain showers are primarily affecting areas **east of the Mississippi River**, extending as far north as the **southern tier of Michigan**. Above-normal temperatures throughout the **Midwest** support off-season farm work in areas where muddy conditions are not impeding activities.

- In the **South**, dry weather favors fieldwork, including early-season planting activities from **southern and coastal Texas to Florida**. Rangeland and pastures in **Texas**, still recovering from last summer’s heat and drought, were rated 56% in very poor to poor condition on February 18. **Florida**’s pastures were in better shape on that date, rated 14% very poor to poor.

**Outlook:** For the remainder of today, a quick-hitting rainfall event in the **eastern U.S.** will be focused across the **Ohio and Tennessee Valleys**, with some locations receiving more than an inch. Precipitation will largely end by late Friday along the **Atlantic Seaboard**. During the weekend, a modest surge of cold air will reach the **Midwest** and **Northeast**, with even colder weather arriving early next week across **northern sections of the Rockies and Plains**. In fact, temperatures below 0°F may occur early next week in **Montana** and environs. Farther south, however, an early-season warm spell should peak on Monday, with high temperatures topping 90°F in parts of **Texas**. Aside from the current rain event unfolding across the **eastern U.S.**, precipitation will be scarce until early next week, when rain and snow showers will return in the **West**. The NWS 6- to 10-day outlook for February 27 – March 2 calls for the likelihood of below-normal temperatures from the **Pacific Coast to western sections of Montana, Wyoming, Utah, and Arizona**, while warmer-than-normal weather will dominate the **central and eastern U.S.**. Meanwhile, near- or above-normal precipitation across most of the country should contrast with drier-than-normal conditions on the **southern High Plains**.

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