

State and Local

Texas faced with changes caused by drought

By Gina Rumore and Susan Erb
Reporters

The Drought of 1988, the worst to plague the country this century, has spread from the cornfields of Indiana to the hay crops of the coastal bend counties of Texas, devastating feed crops, rendering rangeland susceptible to fire and forcing ranchers, farmers and the government to take emergency action.

Fortunately for Texans, most of the Lone Star State has fared a little better than the Corn Belt states, but some areas of Texas are suffering.

The Panhandle, South Plains, Rolling Plains and west central areas of Texas have been blessed with timely rains, a Texas A&M Department of Communications crop report said.

However, the eastern and southern parts of the state have been less fortunate.

The coastal bend counties, Lower Rio Grande Valley, the region southwest of San Antonio and the eastern third of Texas are drier than normal.

Dr. B. J. Ragsdale, range specialist with the Texas Agricultural Extension Service, said that in terms of loss of lives and loss of acreage due to fire, 1988 has been one of Texas' worst years.

"There have been some sizeable fires, and lots of small ones," Ragsdale said.

"In January you could drive along the highway and see small areas where there had been fires. Most were probably started by catalytic converters on cars.

"And I don't think we ever can discount the misuse of fire as a cause. Fire is an excellent tool, but you have to be as careful with it as with any other tool."

Ragsdale said the fires occurred in areas that had a dry enough fall and winter to make conditions right for fire but that received enough rain last year to grow vegetation.

"It has been dry enough in South Texas over a long enough period of time that we haven't had to worry about fire," he said. "There's nothing to burn."

Ragsdale said a wildfire in Breckenridge in February claimed two lives.

Another 230,000 acres of rangeland were lost in Shackelford County in April in one of the largest range fires in Texas history.

The Shackelford fire destroyed many miles of fence and oilfield structures and many head of cattle," Ragsdale said.

Economists expect Texas dairy producers and cotton farmers to come through the summer almost unharmed, but their predictions for cattlemen are a bit more grim.

Dr. Robert Schwartz, economist for the Texas Agricultural Extension Service, said the forecast for Texas dairy producers is encouraging.

Milk production in Texas is up 12 percent from last year, and economists expect an overall production increase in 1988 despite the drought.

"If we keep up with the current trend," Schwartz said, "Texas dairy farmers will produce 4.7 billion pounds of milk in 1988."

"Revising projections down because of the drought, 1988 production is expected to be 4.4 billion to 4.5 billion pounds, still an increase over last year's 4.3 billion pounds."

"There's been one silver lining in this for Texas dairymen: the drought in the Northeast."

Areas that normally import milk from

Wisconsin, where milk production has been down in 1988, have been importing from Texas, where dairy yields are near normal.

"It's been a rough summer for a lot of dairymen as far as cash flow in Texas," Schwartz said.

"We are not out of the woods yet by any means, but it's not as bad as it first appeared. It's much worse in other parts of the country."

Dr. Carl Anderson, an extension service economist, said the drought is affecting the cotton market, but that the impact is minor and limited to certain sections of the state, the worst damage being on the coastal bend and in the South Texas region.

"The cotton industry has been safe from drought," Anderson said, "because Lubbock, which produces 50 percent of Texas' cotton, has been fortunate to have enough rainfall."

"The drought will affect livestock the greatest. The grain has been hit the hardest and that is what's needed for cattle."

Feed grain shortages have forced ranchers to resort to burning prickly pear cactus for emergency feed — an expensive, labor-intensive survival technique.

And ranchers in South and Southwest Texas have thinned their herds, either by sending cattle to slaughter early or to alternate grazing sites.

The 1987 calf crop of 40 million head was the lowest since 1959, and the 1988 calf crop, extension service sources said, is expected to be one million head less.

Total beef production for 1988 is expected to be 3 percent less than in 1987.

In response to the cattlemen's plight, the U.S. Department of Agriculture opened Conservation Reserve Program land for emergency grazing in June and will spend

an extra \$50 million on ground beef in hope of easing the financial stress suffered by ranchers who have been forced to sell cattle early.

Crop farmers hope other government aid, in the form of the proposed Drought Relief Act of 1988, will lighten the financial blow of a brown summer, keeping farm losses to a minimum.

The act, if passed, will aid farmers who have suffered total or near-total crop losses.

The financial relief package could total as much as \$6 billion, bringing farmer incomes up to 50 percent of those expected.

Proposed payments, which would make up portions of projected differences between the actual market prices and target prices set by law, would be made on three levels: to farmers with crop losses up to 35 percent, those with losses between 35 and 75 percent, and those whose losses were 75 percent or more of their crops.

As crops progressively disappear from farmland, overall consumer prices will be changing.

While crops have suffered substantially from the drought, it is difficult to predict the extent of the impact on retail food prices.

However, experts are predicting increases in consumer costs of meat, poultry and produce.

Dr. Richard A. Edwards, an economist for the extension service, said the most significant increases in consumer prices will be in fruits and vegetables, but consumers also will feel the pinch at the meat and poultry counters.

"We usually have an abundant supply of fruits and vegetables at harvest time," Edwards said.

"This year we just don't have that in-

creased supply, so prices are going to rise."

Corn and soybeans, used primarily in cattle and chicken feed, have suffered the worst crop losses, Edwards said, resulting in higher prices.

Earlier in the summer, economists predicted reduced consumer meat prices in response to a surge in livestock selling.

Edwards said those predictions were premature.

"Not all of the cattle sold have gone directly to slaughter," he said. "Some have gone to feed lots, where they are being fed expensive grain."

Expensive grain leads to expensive cattle, expensive cattle to increased consumer beef prices.

And the feed grain shortage is not limited to cattle. Chickens have to eat too.

"Poultry have been fed with feed dramatically higher in price than normal," Edwards said.

"Consumers are pressed to find a whole bird for 79 cents a pound. Last spring they could buy one for 49 cents a pound."

The Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago agricultural newsletter reported consumers may not see changing prices until the late summer, when farmers and ranchers continue to sell off their stock.

According to the newsletter, the current large supply of poultry and eggs will allow for low prices throughout the summer.

However, this period may be fairly short-lived.

The shortage of feed for poultry farmers translates into reduced chicken flocks, eggs and slaughters.

Bush accuses Dukakis of being out of touch

CORPUS CHRISTI (AP) — Vice President George Bush returned to his adopted home state Thursday and accused Massachusetts Gov. Michael Dukakis of being out of touch with the values of Texans and Hispanic Americans.

"My heartbeat is the Texas heartbeat, and his is the liberal Democrat from Massachusetts, who is not Texas," Bush said.

"That is what is going to decide this election," Bush told reporters

before addressing the American GI Forum, a predominantly Hispanic veterans' and civil rights organization.

"When you have a man that stands for getting rid of guns, that is not the Texas viewpoint," Bush said of Dukakis, the Democratic presidential nominee.

"Texans don't favor federal gun control, for example. Texans think it's OK to say the Pledge of Alle-

giance in the public schools of the United States."

He was greeted at the airport by Oscar Moran, immediate past national president of the League of United Latin American Citizens, and Republican Gov. Bill Clements, who said he was proud "to welcome the hometown boy home."

Bush, who maintains a residence in Maine, has called Texas his home state since 1948 and lists a Houston hotel as his voting address.

Bush, expected to be named the GOP presidential nominee at the party's convention later this month in New Orleans, said in winning the Hispanic vote, it does not matter that he cannot speak Spanish the way Dukakis can.

"It isn't whether you speak Spanish," Bush said. "It's what's in your blood, what values you share."

GI Forum leaders this week have criticized Dukakis for not attending

their 40th annual national convention and said it may cost the the Massachusetts governor votes among Hispanics.

Bush told reporters he does not think U.S. Sen. Lloyd Bentsen Jr. of Texas will help Dukakis in the state because, "Texans are going to vote at the top of the ticket."

On energy policy, Bush said he favors deregulating natural gas, lowering taxes on producers and development of nuclear energy.

Correction

A story in Thursday's *Battalion* incorrectly identified the call number of KANM as 90.9. The station's correct call number is 99.9.

The campus cable station plans to broadcast over the FM airwaves by next summer thanks to grant from the Department of Student Activities.

Call number 90.9 belongs to campus radio station KAMU. The *Battalion* regrets the error.

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12.26		.75	\$375	\$600	.52	\$665	\$1,200	.47
2.04	\$6,950	1,395	335	600	.45	325	600	.41
2.01	5,250	1,480	335	600	.10	95	200	.35
1.78	4,965	1,495	275	500				.25
1.61	5,325	1,125	335	600				.23
1.51	3,875	1,395	210	400				.18
1.43	5,550	1,395	165	300	1.11	\$2,740	\$5,000	.11
1.24 w/GIA report	2,500	1,395	185	400	1.02	2,525	5,000	
1.18	2,325	1,050	215	400	1.02	1,650	3,200	
1.17	2,750	1,395	165	300	.99	2,570	5,000	2.12
1.11	2,350	795	111	200	.81	2,385	4,500	1.61
1.09	3,950	995	111	200	.64	1,350	2,400	1.23
1.09	2,195	895	95	180	.62	1,475	2,800	1.23
1.09	2,750	795	78	140	.52	1,250	2,400	1.18
1.09	3,850	795	63	120	.47	795	1,500	.95
1.05 w/GIA report	2,950	795	55	110	.33	395	800	.70
1.04	2,150	850	48	90	.28	385	800	.65
1.03	2,195	795	45	90	.25	325	600	.63
1.03	3,595	695	41	80				.62
1.01	1,495	695	35	70				.58
1.01	1,895	795	30	60	2.04	\$11,875	\$23,000	.58
1.01	3,495	895	14.95	30	1.56	4,775	6,500	.57
1.01	2,185	595	10.95	30	1.10	3,275	5,300	.53
.95	2,395	695			1.05	2,675	4,900	.51
.93	1,595	795			1.02	2,275	3,900	.50
.92	1,850	875			1.01	1,275	2,200	.41
.91	3,195	795			.89	1,750	3,300	.28
.90	1,750	695			.89	1,795	3,590	.10
.89	1,350	695			.82	1,575	2,900	
.89	895	795			.79	1,895	3,600	
.85	1,340	695			.74	795	1,500	
.84	1,685	695			.72	1,650	3,300	.90
.83	2,150	695			.70	1,795	3,300	.75
.81	1,595	650			.70	1,250	2,400	.58
.80	985	595			.61	975	1,800	.51
.77	1,075	495			.55	850	1,700	
.77	950	575			.55	895	1,800	
.75	1,135	275			.51	950	1,900	2.16
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