

Chat from “Drought Listening Session”

Sponsored by Oregon State University (OSU) Extension Service

Hosted by Maud Powell, Jan 20, 2022

Farmer comments on water situation:

- Crop stress
- I am not a farmer but I work with 2 farms that have closed and 1 farmer who had to switch properties
- Excess heat has caused pollen to dessicate in certain seed crops, which reduces yield
- shifting growing season — can't grow in July/August so moving to growing in greenhouses in the winter
- We've made sure our crops were stressed early to not require a lot of water. Still, when TID cut off water, we were left with nothing but well water (which we won't use for crops) and saved rainwater. The pull-down by illegal pot/hemp grows has exacerbated the problem.
- have had to shift away from crops that need later season (after July) water
- have had to spend more time and labor laying mulch to hold water in the soil
- Not receiving enough water to have one hay harvest. That leads to very high hay prices and beef farmers having to sell off their livestock.
- Purchasing water for tanks
- From Rogue Valley Food System Network to Everyone 05:58 PM
- shorter growing seasons, not producing enough to maintain current markets/demands
- My bees are starving in ag areas - we had to bring them water multiple times a week last summer, which was super costly - staff time wise
- Neighborhood and social conflicts increasing. Regarding who is using water and how much water is being used.
- crop rotations have been affected by more limitations in what crops can be grown in a dry season
- Crop failure particularly tree fruit not growing to marketable size
- difficulty establishing fall cover crops without rainfall
- Once beef farmers have sold off the livestock they will not easily return. Higher meat prices at stores.

- pressure for real estate development of farm lands, disinterest by some elected officials to address water shortage for ag in better water catchment
- It feels like death by 1000 cuts - higher disease and pest pressure in my hives, unable to treat with medications because of the high temps, not enough nutrition to keep them healthy, increased pesticides and less water with weed grows
- Limited financial support for switching to region agriculture
- very little financial help to farmers to implement regenerative ag practices - equipment, training, how to build a carbon marketplace - we need to tap much of the \$ coming to our State!
- Increased pesticide pressure
- brutal on mental health
- Farmer friends moving away
- Trying to get my ranching partners to do rotational grazing/ holistic management, but not having much luck 😞
- just trying to increase water storage capacity through ponds, tanks, bladders, and use of mulch
- along those lines, pond lining
- Working with the TID office. If there is no water there just isn't a hay crop and we are shut down for the year.
- just trying to increase water storage capacity through ponds, tanks, bladders, and use of mulch
- along those lines, pond lining
- Electric collars for livestock eliminates need for fencing?

From Macrory Powell, Maud Powell, OSU Extension

- We need data
- More concentrated work season
- Farmers are moving north
- Heat has impacted attendance at farmers market
- farmers experiencing increased anxiety, stress, depression
- Fewer farmers going to markets

- There is a need for data on where the water that does exist is going. Is it being used lawfully? That data does not seem exist for Evans creek.
- Political will. Making sure farmers are at the table
- Go look at the lakes! They are near empty.

From Paul DeMaggio, Jackson County Soil and Water Conservation District

- In short - The reservoirs that supply TID did not fill up and therefore the irrigation season gets shortened. If TID was able to reduce/fine tune the delivery from the lakes into the canals, then the season could be extended. However, given the current infrastructure in the existing canals and turnouts, these adjustments to deliver water based on crop water need are difficult to do.
- Second question: How is this effecting farmers? In short - The reservoirs that supply TID did not fill up and therefore the irrigation season gets shortened. If TID was able to reduce/fine tune the delivery from the lakes into the canals, then the season could be extended. However, given the current infrastructure in the existing canals and turnouts, these adjustments to deliver water based on crop water need are difficult to do.
- Yes, I have gotten more calls about irrigation improvements. More funds available for drought resilience for larger systems
- more conversations about irrigation efficiency than ever before, more interest in soil health practices, the importance of soil health for water quantity and quality
- JSWCD has an equipment rental program to assist farmers with planting new drought tolerant forage/grasses. We speak a lot about drought tolerant forage on site visits.
- Rainwater and gray water plus mulch and wise plant selection. Stressing the plants early. When conservation methods have been implemented, that's pretty much it.
- Piping irrigation canals and ditches, to allow for more storage in the reservoirs, to increase the irrigation season. More storage, such as bulge ponds, increased upland storage in soils
- Call Trevor Morris, Business Manager, Jackson County Soil and Water Conservation District, 541-423-6167
- JSWCD also has a small grant program for soil health improvements and pasture management. We can help pay for fencing, stockwater, seed, etc. Meghan Montgomery 541-630-6169

From Rogue Valley Food System Network

- Orchards are being dug up and more housing is being developed on that land
- Or turned into hemp

- talked to a couple farmers about water issues - they feel like "powers that be" want to end farming in our region and let everything be trucked in from outside. This is totally antithetical to our climate solutions!
- As said, it's not just the crops but it's getting hard to stay in one's home if there wells are going dry. Beef ranchers are spending too much \$\$ on hay even using their neighbor's grassland. While we're used to weather variability, this is way beyond normal and it seems related to development and illegal grows.
- ablinn@rvfoodsystem.org
- Please visit www.cultivateoregon.org to see the huge "Soil Sequestration" summit last year. Rhianna Simes, Dr Ray Seidler and others are continuing work to create a Carbon Marketplace for working landowners in Oregon.
- opportunities/information
- email for carbon sequestration opportunities/information
- Jackson County Community Food Assessment, 2013: https://164xbp2ocd6p4enk8z35eujo-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Jackson-County-Community-Food-Assessment_web.pdf
- Josephine County Food Assessment, 2012: https://164xbp2ocd6p4enk8z35eujo-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/JoCo-Food-Assessment-FINAL_web.pdf
- Oregon Climate & Agriculture Network (ORCan) www.oregonclimateag.org. In collaboration with farmers, our goal is to build a regenerative agricultural economy in Oregon that is rooted in community and thrives through disruptions big and small. Getting us there requires a collaborative, multi-disciplinary, and multicultural approach.

From Catie Faryl

- Citizens demanding more respect for our wetlands, creeks and streams - we have an applicant for development in Phoenix where they stated "they'd relocate the spring!" and seems absolutely unaware of the wetlands on property. Citizens are working with many entities to get more attention to preserving our waterways. Also advocating for building new water catchment.
- What's missing:
 - Information on water use efficiency, evapotranspiration – Paul DeMaggio spoke to that – promoting irrigation mgmt. Extension could do water retention techniques for uplands— the good old swales, ditches, dams, etc. (Permaculture). Planting trees for shade on water collection areas, etc. – a “use it or lose it” system in past flood irrigation, now that needs to change
 - Lack of planning, Unnecessary crops and wealthy growers outpace small farms

- How is cannabis effecting farmers, mental health, fire and smoke too
- Extension could do water retention techniques for uplands— the good old swales, ditches, dams, etc. (Permaculture). Planting trees for shade on water collection areas, etc.
- Field irrigation also regenerates the ground water aquifers. It doesn't all just go away to evaporation.
- Lisa Arkin and Beyond Toxics to take on those issues.
- data/information on the value of small farms in SE OR

Maud Powell's Summary:

Based on notes we took at the drought listening session, farmers are interested in education on the following topics:

1. Animals better-suited to dry climates
2. Plants/crops/forages better suited to dry climates
3. Permaculture design
4. Water storage and catchment
5. Regenerative ag practices