**Where in the World is El Nino?**

We are suffering through some terrible drought conditions and are now classified as being in severe drought on the US drought monitor. Many folks are asking what happened to the El Nino that is predicted to hit the U.S. and Texas in particular. My climatology knowledge is limited, but El Nino occurs when Pacific Ocean sea waters along the equator warm above average. As a result of the current readings of those temperatures, it is believed this will be a very strong El Nino. Typically, that means a wetter and cooler winter for Texas and Central Texas in particular.

Looking at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) predictions and talking to the State Climatologist Dr.John Nielsen-Gammon, it appears our current dry weather pattern will change as a result of El Nino this Fall. When this fall is the big question. Currently, it looks more likely to begin in the October-November timeframe. According to predictions it is expected the wetter than normal conditions will last at least through June of next year.

Unfortunately, if it does not move in until Mid-October or November, it will be too late to help any summer pastures or hay meadows. However, it does present the possibility for some small grain or ryegrass production. While everyone would love to get small grains in the ground early for winter grazing, be leery of planting too early. Not much spells disaster for small grains faster than a ½” rain followed by hot dry conditions. Keep in mind armyworms and grasshoppers will probably be problematic until our first frost. If the predictions hold true a mid-October planting might be advisable this year. It will certainly delay grazing but might help you hit a better moisture timeline. It may also limit the amount of time you have to deal with pest pressure.

There will be challenges presented by a wetter and cooler winter that due to the extremely dry summer, we are not really equipped to deal with this year. A wetter cooler winter means more feed and forage may be needed to meet cattle’s energy requirements. Late fall and winter calving herds will have to closely monitor calf health. Muddy lots, hay feeding areas, and roads are more of a nuisance than anything, but still can be challenging. Start making plans now for how you might manage for the these and other potential challenges on your farm or ranch this winter.

While, the summer of 2018 is a loss for any dryland crops and cattle producers. The potential for some moisture in coming months is a relief and means that we are at least not going into a multi-year drought. Getting tanks filled-up, aquafers recharged and soil moisture levels back in shape makes the next year look a little brighter, and for sure improves everyone’s outlook.