Searing dry spell hurts area crops

Searing hot temperatures and below normal rainfall in much of the parish are causing rapid deterioration of pastures, hay meadows, soybeans, sweet potatoes, corn and grain sorghum, according to J. Aubrey Mire, county agent with the Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service.

Mire reports concern continues to mount for those crops most sensitive to moisture stress. "Many parish cattlemen are feeding hay and supplement, which is highly unusual considering the season," he says. "Pastures, along with row crops, have been under severe stress in many fields, and the situation is quite serious because they need to be making growth and setting fruit."

The county agent points out unrelenting heat and lack of moisture have brought about havoc with pastures parched by the summer sun. "Even hay meadows are showing drought symptoms and current hay yield is down. Cattlemen need to make hay for the winter at this time," Mire stresses.

Evangeline's rice crop is not being adversely affected by the dry weather; however, Mire comments the rice farmers' bank accounts are being hit hard to pay for the continuous pumping of irrigation water into rice fields.

The last general rain in this parish fell during the last week of May.

"Even if we received a rain," Mire says, "our parish cattlemen would still be in serious trouble as it takes a week and a half or two before you can experience grass growth after an extended period.

Ironically, the effects of December's record-breaking cold snap are compounding the problem for parish cattlemen.

"Bitter cold temperatures for a prolonged period caused destruction of some stands of our three, major perennial pasture grasses, namely, Bermuda, Dallas and Bahia grass. Pastures have not completely recovered from this as there continues to be bare spots where grass has not re-established itself."