

University of California  
 Agriculture and Natural Resources  
 Making a Difference for California



Spring 2021 (NO. 1)

# Livestock, Range, & Watershed

San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara and Monterey Counties

SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY  
 COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

350 North Main St. Ste. B  
 Templeton, CA 93465  
 Phone: 805-434-4106  
 Fax: 805-434-4881

EXECUTIVE EDITOR:

Royce Larsen  
 Natural Resource/Watershed  
 Advisor

IN THIS ISSUE:  
 DROUGHT UPDATE



## We are in a Drought—Again!

Royce Larsen

Seems like droughts are becoming much too common. With little hope of more rain this year, the outlook is not good in terms of having stream flow, filling our reservoirs and ground water basins, or even growing enough forage for livestock. Its not just California though, the entire western US is once again in the midst of a major drought, with many areas experiencing extreme and exceptional drought categories, figure 1. More information about the US Drought Monitor can be found at: <https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/>

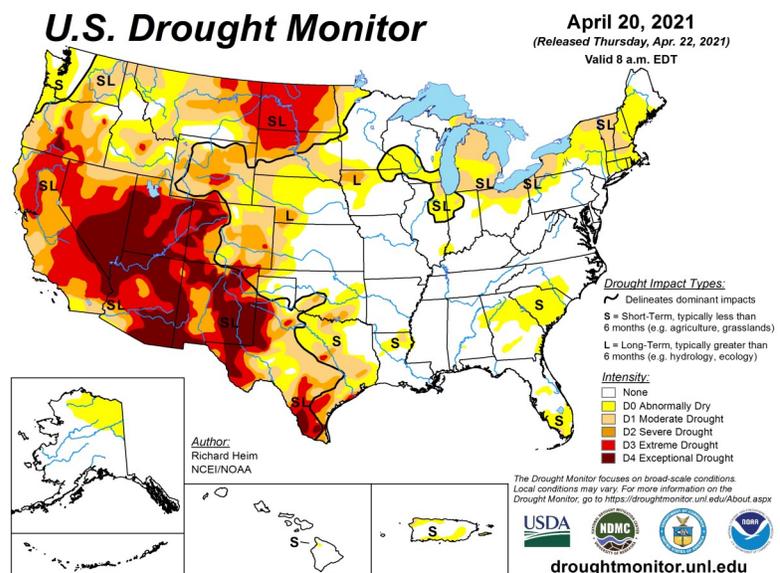
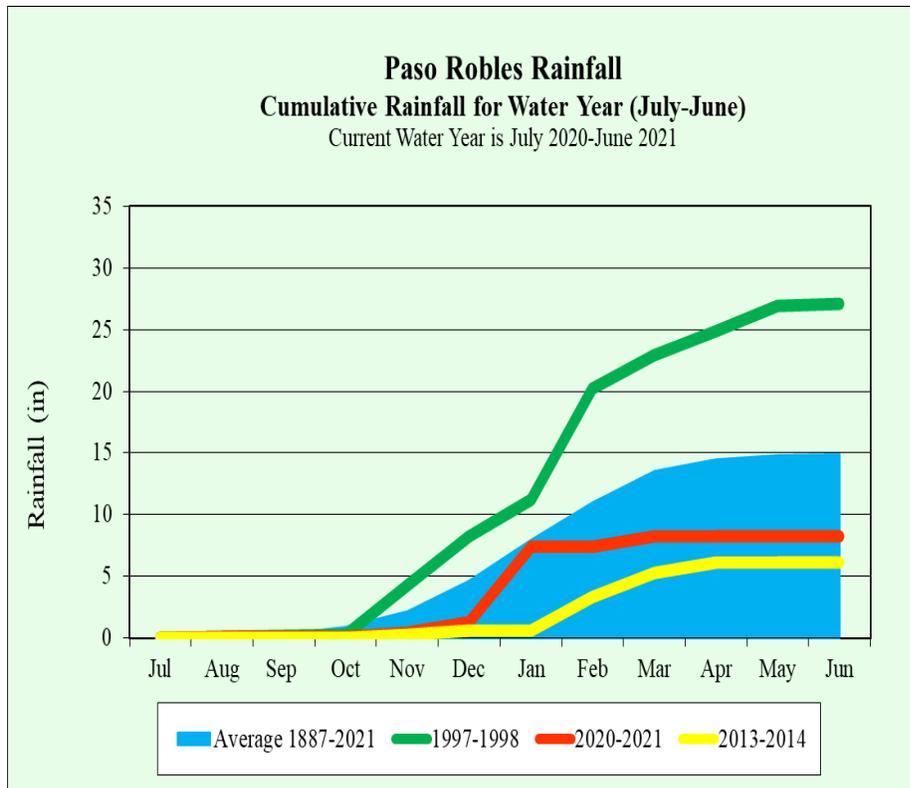


Figure 1. US Drought Monitor. Note the western US is experiencing a major drought.

What does this mean for the Central Coast? There have been several droughts in recent years, with an exceptionally harsh drought occurring between 2012-2016. How does this year's drought compare to other years? At Paso Robles since 1887, there been 11 years ( of the 133 years) with lower rainfall than we have received so far. This year Paso Robles has received 8.27 inches, which is 55% of average, figure 2.

In normal years, most of the forage growth on the Central Coast occurs in late March through April after the temperature warms enough for the grass to grow. For this growth to occur, moisture along with warm temperatures, is needed. You can watch a short 1 1/2 minute time-lapse video showing forage growth during a typical growing season on the Central Coast at:

<http://www.ucanr.org/blogs/blogcore/postdetail.cfm?postnum=41158>



The low rainfall this year left the soil conditions dry during this main part of the growing season, especially in April. Though we had a large storm in January, figure 3, the rest of the year experienced below normal rainfall, with less than 1 inch in March and April, when the plants really need the moisture.

Even though we have not completed our forage production monitoring for this year, it appears that the forage production will be very low again. However, we have had other years with low production since 2001, when

Figure 2. Cumulative rainfall for the current rainfall year, including the long-term average (1887-2021), a wet year (1997-1998) and a dry year (2013-2014) . *Data from Paso Robles*

we started monitoring. This was especially true during the 2012-2016 period, with 2014 being particularly severe, figure 4. Forage production for 2014 was only 5% of normal. This was a very difficult year on the livestock industry. Many cattle had to be sold, or moved to other places which had forage, or supplemental feed was needed. This year will have better production than during 2014, but it will still be low. We will have the results for this year soon. These droughts that seem to be coming often, are continuing to present difficult management decisions for ranchers.

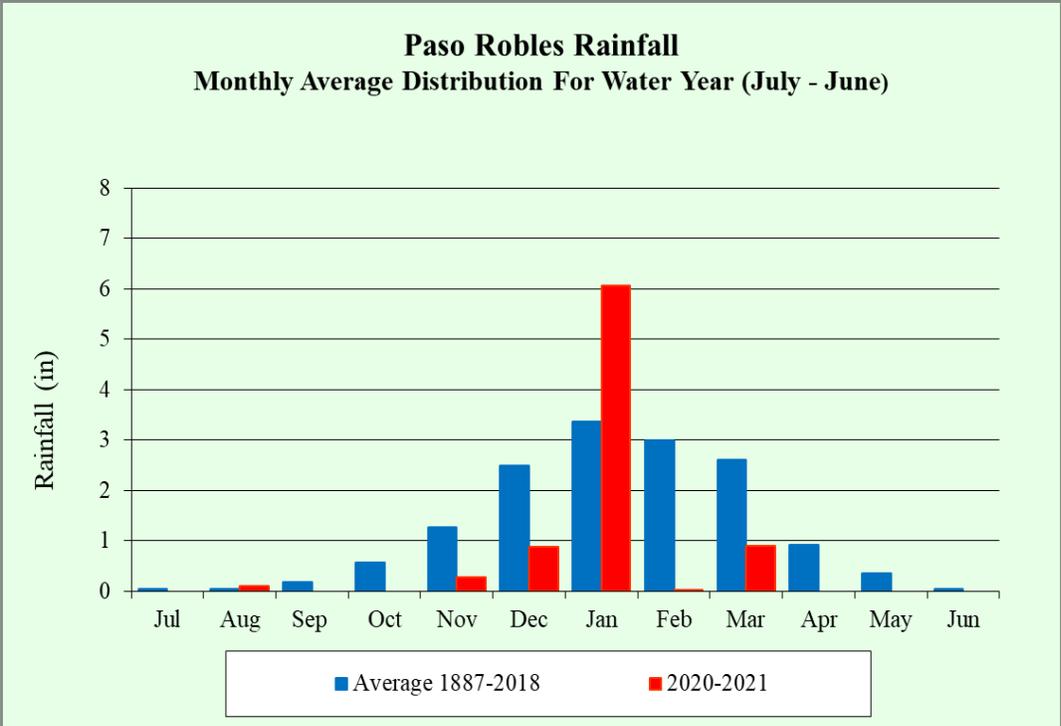


Figure 3. Long term monthly rainfall distribution (1887-2021). For 2021, there was a wet January, but all other months were below normal rainfall. *Data from Paso Robles.*

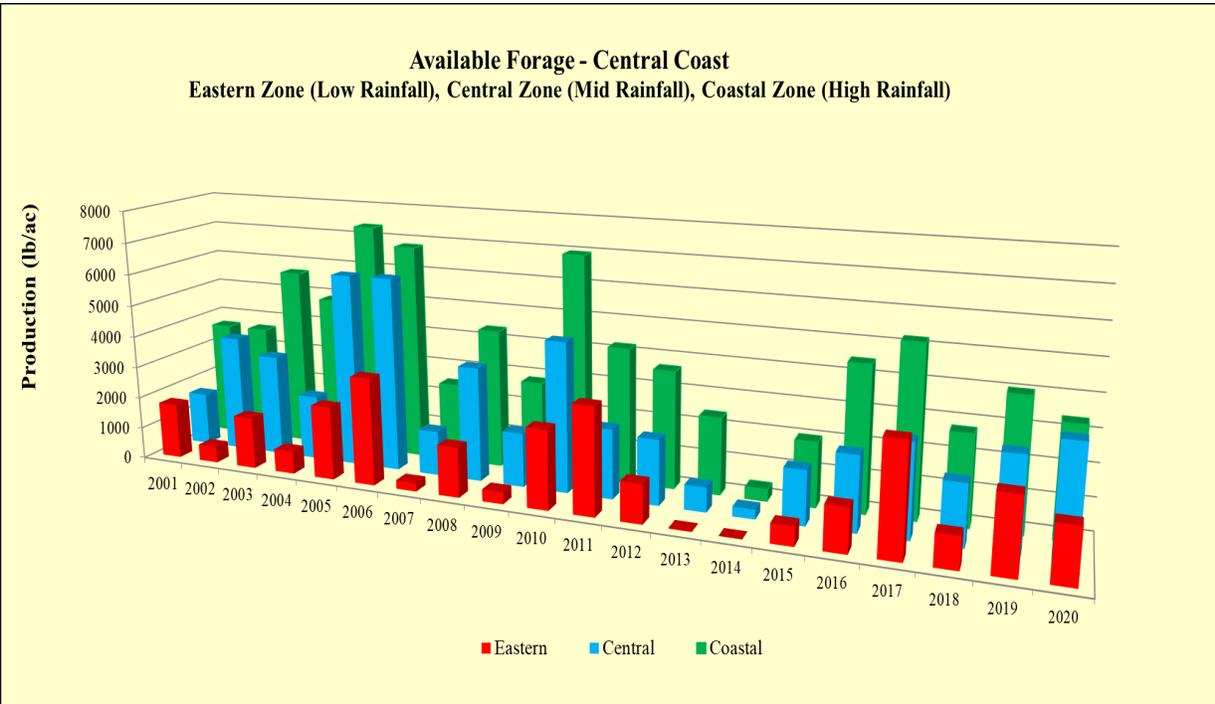


Figure 4. Forage production on the Central Coast since 2001.

There are some tools that can help with making these difficult decisions. Dan Macon, UCCE, has put together some ideas about possible managing decisions during a drought, table 1. Some of the proactive tools may not work this year unless you had already planned-ahead, but reactive management options are still available. More information will be coming in the next news letter for some of these tools, such as grass-banking.

Table 1. Some tools that can be used while making management decisions during droughts.

	Forage Supply Flexibility	Forage Demand Flexibility
<b>Proactive Tools</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conservative stocking rate</li> <li>• Grass-banking</li> <li>• Pasture rest</li> <li>• Pasture/range insurance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying animals that could be sold</li> <li>• Incorporate additional classes of livestock</li> <li>• Multi-species grazing</li> </ul>
<b>Reactive Tools</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supplemental feeding</li> <li>• Substitution feeding</li> <li>• Stock water development or hauling</li> <li>• Apply for government assistance</li> <li>• Rent additional land</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early weaning</li> <li>• Selling replacements</li> <li>• Culling</li> <li>• Allow body condition to decline</li> </ul>

The USDA also offers drought impacted California farmers and ranchers immediate disaster assistance. For example, the USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA) offers disaster assistance and low-interest loan programs to assist you in your recovery efforts following drought.

Some other available programs and loans include:

- **Non-Insured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP)** - provides financial assistance to producers of non-insurable crops when low yields, loss of inventory, or prevented planting occur due to natural disasters including qualifying drought (includes native grass for grazing).
- **Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP)** – provides compensation to eligible livestock producers who suffered grazing losses for covered livestock due to drought on privately owned or cash leased land
- **Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP)** - offers payments to eligible producers for livestock death losses in excess of normal mortality due to adverse weather. Drought is not an eligible adverse weather event, except when associated with anthrax, a condition that occurs because of drought and directly results in the death of eligible livestock.
- **Tree Assistance Program (TAP)** – provides assistance to eligible orchardists and nursery tree growers for qualifying tree, shrub and vine losses due to natural disasters including excessive wind and qualifying drought.
- **Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP)** - provides emergency relief for losses due to feed or water shortages, disease, adverse weather, or other conditions, which are not adequately addressed by other disaster programs.
- **Emergency Loan Program** – available to producers with agriculture operations located in a county under a primary or contiguous Secretarial Disaster designation. These low interest loans help producers recover from production and physical losses.
- **Emergency Conservation Program (ECP)** - provides emergency funding for farmers and ranchers to rehabilitate land severely damaged by natural disasters and to implement emergency water conservation measures in periods of severe drought.

To establish or retain FSA program eligibility, you must report prevented planting and failed acres (crops and grasses). Prevented planting acreage must be reported on form *FSA-576, Notice of Loss*, no later than 15 calendar days after the final planting date as established by FSA and Risk Management Agency (RMA).

For more information on these programs, contact your San Luis Obispo County USDA Service Center at (805) 434-0396 ext. 2 or visit [fsa.usda.gov/disaster](http://fsa.usda.gov/disaster).



*Royce Larsen*

Watershed / Natural Resource Advisor  
350 N. Main Street, Suite B  
Templeton, CA 93461  
(805) 434-4106  
[relarsen@ucanr.edu](mailto:relarsen@ucanr.edu)  
<http://cesanluisobispo.ucanr.edu/>

#### **Coronavirus Information**

**We are facing a crisis like most of us have never seen before. The state of California has issued an order to shelter-in-place. All UCCE employees have been directed to work remotely. However, we are still available by phone and email. UCANR, and the San Luis Obispo office, lead by Dr. Katherine Soule, has put together a lot of information about the coronavirus, and there are regular updates from UCANR. This information can be found at: <http://cesanluisobispo.ucanr.edu/>**