



# THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

POSTED: Saturday, Apr. 30, 2011

## Cold, wet April delays Whatcom County crops

DAVE GALLAGHER - THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

It may have seemed like a month filled with deluges of rain and November-like cold, but this isn't the worst April on record in the Bellingham area.

It's actually been seventh coldest so far, according to the National Weather Service meteorologists.

The average temperature - combining highs and lows - was 45.2 degrees as of Thursday, April 28, higher than the miserable 44.3 set in the '70s.

Bellingham has had more than 4 inches of rain, well above the average 2.75 inches but shy of the 1992 record of 6.09 inches, meteorologist Johnny Burg said.

While the chilly weather and lack of sun has been an annoyance to many residents, it's becoming a source of frustration for Whatcom County farmers, said Henry Bierlink, executive director of the Washington Red Raspberry Commission and Whatcom Farm Friends.

He estimates some farmers are about a month behind schedule because the cold has kept plants from blooming while the wet weather has created muddy conditions, preventing other work from being done.

"This really emphasizes how much the unpredictability of weather has on this industry," Bierlink said.

At this stage, Bierlink said it's too early to tell if the cold spring will impact the overall harvest. If the weather becomes warmer and drier in May and June, it could lead to normal production levels, but the harvest would be compacted into a shorter time frame.

A worse scenario for local farmers is a warm stretch in February or March, allowing plants to bloom early, followed by a cold snap in April. That didn't happen this year.

Even the local dairy market is being impacted by the cold spring. Typically the first cut for grass or silage to feed the cows takes place in mid-April; that first cut still hasn't happened for most local farmers because it's been so wet and cold.

Local dairy farms tend to have empty silos at this time of year, with farmers expecting them to be filled with the first cut. With no first cut, farmers now have to decide whether to wait it out or buy hay and feed at higher-than-normal prices because of increased fuel costs, Bierlink said.

Jay Dennison, a business manager for Growing Washington, which manages the Alm Hill Gardens near Everson, said it's been a waiting game at the farm. Even if vegetables were ready for harvest, the fields have been too wet to get much work done.

"We've been able to grow a lot of stuff under cover, which helps, but we really could use some sun," Dennison said.

Some vegetables such as broccoli and cauliflower can thrive under the current conditions, but other products such as tomatoes and fruits don't, making it hard to bring a variety to the market.

"People are still coming out to the farmer's market, so that's been great to see that support," Dennison said.

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