



## U.S. Drought Monitor rates county as 'severe'

**By Jan Schultz**

***The Imperial Republican***

Lack of rain and continued extreme warm temperatures have resulted in drought conditions in nearly every county in Nebraska.

The U.S. Drought Monitor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln has ranked all of Nebraska from moderate to extreme drought. Chase County is in the "severe" category, which encompasses more than two-thirds of the state.

Last Thursday, Chase County became one of 23 counties in the state granted a disaster declaration by the USDA that has opened up eligibility for emergency loans with reduced interest rates.

Chase County is contiguous, or bordering, to the six officially declared disaster counties—Dundy, Hayes, Hitchcock, Frontier, Red Willow and Furnas.

Being an adjacent county makes Chase eligible for the same benefits.

Several other emergency actions have occurred the past several days and weeks.

Ranchers in the state will benefit from the statewide emergency haying and grazing of Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) lands approved Monday this week.

Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack is also allowing producers to modify Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) contracts to allow haying and grazing on Wetlands Reserve Program acres.

U.S. Sen Mike Johanns, who requested the action along with other Nebraska representatives, said it was needed.

"The relief is much needed for Nebraska's farmers and ranchers struggling to cope with forage needs during one of the worst droughts in our country's history," Johanns said.

In early July, Nebraska Gov. Dave Heineman authorized an emergency declaration for statewide drought, which allows the state to provide personnel and resources to assist in drought emergencies

Roadside haying and grazing across Nebraska was opened up July 5 and is administered through a permit process.

Producers need to check with the respective government agencies on the emergency programs.

### **Calves being lost**

Southwest 4 Extension Agent Robert Tigner said the pastures in this area "are awful."

Tigner was helping out at the Dundy County Fair Horse Show Wednesday, which was receiving a bit of rain. However, he didn't expect it to bring much, just "settle the dust a little."

He's been hearing reports of local ranchers who are losing calves due to inhalation pneumonia, caused by excessive dust inhalation.

"It could be in the hundreds," he said.

Tigner said he's surprised the cows he's seen haven't lost more condition than they had.

"They look pretty good for how short the pastures are this year," he said.

However, there is some concern with maintaining their weight the rest of the year, which could affect calving weights next year.

Some producers are cutting dryland corn for hay, but Tigner said it's important that it be checked for nitrate levels before it's fed. That can be done by sending samples into a forage testing lab.