By Jan Schultz
The Imperial Republican

According to the latest U.S. Drought Monitor map, nearly all of Chase County is now in the "extreme" category, moving to a stage worse than a week earlier.

Just last week, the county was in the "severe" category, but joined most of Nebraska now as "extreme" in the National Drought Mitigation Center's July 26 map.

It's not hard to believe with just 9.71 inches of moisture since the first of the year and multiple days with 100-plus temperatures.

Since May, Imperial has received just 3.89 inches of rain, based on readings taken by Cory Schuller in the city limits. Other areas of the county have had varying amounts.

As bad as it is here, some areas of the state are worse.

Part of central Nebraska now is experiencing the state's first "exceptional" drought—the most intense level on the map—in eight years, according to the National Drought Mitigation Center.

Brian Fuchs, a climatologist and U.S. Drought Monitor author, said the intense drought has come on fairly quickly.

"In eight weeks, we went from being in fairly good condition to having the whole state in severe drought or worse," Fuchs said.

Nebraska is not alone, however.

The most recent Drought Monitor set a record for the fourth straight week for the area in moderate drought or worse in the 12-year history of the map and showed widespread intensification of drought.

Based on the July 26 map, 53.44 percent of the U.S. and Puerto Rico is in moderate drought or worse, 38.11 percent in severe drought or worse, 17.2 percent in extreme drought (incl. Chase County) or worse and just under 2 percent ranked for exceptional drought.

Every state in the U.S. has at least a small area ranked as abnormally dry or worse.

The USDA also reported that almost 40 percent of the country's ag land is in severe or worse drought, affecting 62 percent of farms, 88 percent of the corn crop and 73 percent of cattle areas.