



Sue Swinson autographs a copy of her latest book for 7-year-old local reader Loreli Britton. Swinson, a Lubbock-based children's book author, paid a visit to Blessed by the Best Gift Shoppe, 405 Lubbock Rd., for a book-signing session Saturday morning.

Texas Crop Report

COLLEGE STATION, Texas (AP) — The following reports were compiled by AgriLife Extension Service for the week of March 12:

Central: Some counties got as much as 3 inches of rain. There were reports of aphids, but overall, small grains were doing well. Corn and grain sorghum were being planted. Rains slowed the planting of milo. Bermuda grass broke dormancy.

Coastal Bend: The eastern part of the region received light rain, but western counties remained extremely dry. High winds and poor soil moisture made it hard to prepare fields for spring planting. Trees were dying in some areas, and then breaking apart due to high winds. Livestock producers continued providing supplemental feed for livestock and further culling herds.

East: Most counties received about an inch of rain. High winds quickly dried out soils and caused damage to trees in some areas. Planting of spring vegetables began in parts of the region. Fruit trees were blooming. Spring calving was in full swing. Overall, cattle were in good condition with hay feeding continuing. Feral hogs were active and causing problems for landowners. Henderson County producers reported lice problems on beef cattle.

Far West: Mild temperatures, and dry and windy conditions resulted in high wildfire alerts. A light hail and rain storm moved through the southeastern corner of Val Verde County on March 9. Pastures began to green up. Farmers are beginning to plant corn, oats and chiles. Onions were already planted.

North: Soil-moisture levels were short to adequate, with more rain needed. Winds dried out topsoil, but field conditions remain good, and corn planting began. Winter wheat looked good, with farmers top-dressing it with nitrogen fertilizer. Winter pastures were in good condition, as were livestock. Spring calving was beginning in some areas. Most producers continued supplemental feeding of livestock. Feral hog damage of pastures was reported. Peach growers were concerned about the recent temperature fluctuations effect on blooming trees.

Panhandle: Temperatures were near to above average. Soil-moisture levels were mostly short to adequate. Producers were top-dressing small grains with fertilizer, spraying insecticides to control aphids, and applying herbicides for various warm-weather weeds. Wheat began to improve with recent moisture and warm temperatures. Livestock producers were grazing stocker cattle on wheat that had responded to irrigation and recent snows. Rangeland and pastures continued to be mostly in poor to very poor condition.

Rolling Plains: Although many counties were passed over by recent snows and rains, the extra moisture made other producers more optimistic. Winter wheat perked up almost overnight where moisture was received. Many livestock producers continued to graze cattle on wheat, as pastures didn't offer much grazing. Grasses were slowly starting to green up, but producers were cautious as to run-

ning cattle on them. They wanted to allow pastures to recover more before beginning to graze them. Livestock were in fair to good condition with continued supplemental feeding. Hay supplies were nearly depleted in some areas. Cotton producers were ready for the cotton-planting season to begin and hoped for more rain. Some fields were being prepared for planting hay grazer if moisture levels became favorable. The rains and warm weather caused wildflowers to bloom, and both feral and domestic bees were foraging. Though many hives didn't make it through the winter, those that did seemed to be very healthy and vigorous. Some trees were budding and flowering.

South: Soil-moisture levels ranged from 80 to 100 percent short in the northern parts of the region, and 60 to 100 percent very short in the eastern, western and southern parts of the region. High winds, warm temperatures and low humidity continued to dry topsoils. The drought continued to stress native grasses throughout the entire region. In Atascosa County, producers held off on planting some of their crops because of dry conditions. In Frio County, potatoes under irrigation were doing well. In McMullen County, spring calving was progressing well, but nursing needs further added to mother cows' nutritional stress. Supplemental feeding was being steadily provided in an effort to keep body condition scores fair. In many southern counties, cotton and grain sorghum producers further delayed planting due to the extreme drought conditions. In Kleberg and Kenedy counties, cotton growers said they felt current drought conditions are worse than they were in 2009 when they could not plant any cotton. Some said the current drought is worse than the one they experienced back in the 1950s. In Zavala County, dryland grain sorghum, corn and cotton planting were still on hold. Also in that county, growers continued irrigating where they had the capacity to do so, and the cabbage and spinach harvests were very active. In Maverick County, winter oats and wheat were reportedly in good condition.

South Plains: More rain and severe storms were forecast for the weekend of March 9-10, but only a few areas received any moisture. Most areas only got wind. Swisher County reported that about 1,000 head of cattle had wandered out of their pastures during the recent blizzard, but most were found within two to four days. Southern parts of the region remained dry. Producers were doing some fieldwork, including pre-plant herbicide and fertilizer applications. Wheat varied from the near-jointing to the jointing stage, and was somewhat improved after the snow. Some fruit trees were already blooming in Lubbock County. Pasture and rangeland in low-lying areas improved somewhat, but generally needed more moisture. Stock-tank levels were low to dry. Cattle were mostly in fair to good condition with ranchers providing supplemental feed on cold and wet days.

Southwest: The region remained dry with little to no rain received. The drought persisted.

Livestock producers continued providing supplemental feed for livestock.

West Central: Drought conditions continued as dry and windy weather dried out soils. Days were getting warmer, but nights were still cold. Wildfire danger increased. A few areas had scattered rain with hail storms. Land preparations were under way for spring crops. Farmers had to make planting decisions before the March 15 crop insurance deadline. Rangeland and pastures remained in poor condition. Very little grass was available for grazing. Supplemental feeding of livestock continued. Stock-tank water levels further declined, with some tanks completely dry.

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Oil & Gas

The price of oil inched up to near \$94 a barrel Tuesday ahead of a vote by lawmakers in Cyprus on an unpopular proposal to impose a tax on bank deposits to fund a bailout for the cash-strapped country.

By early afternoon in Europe, benchmark oil for April delivery was up 9 cents to \$93.83 a barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. The contract rose 29 cents to end at \$93.74 a barrel in New York on Monday.

Traders are worried about a plan to seize up to 10 percent of money in savings accounts in Cyprus to help pay for a \$20.4 billion financial bailout. The country's eurozone partners and the International Monetary Fund would contribute \$10 billion of the total. The government shut down banks until later this week while lawmakers wrangled over how to keep the island nation from bankruptcy. A vote is expected Tuesday.

Some bank customers withdrew as much of their cash as they could and the fear was the panic could spread to other countries and prompt capital flight from weaker EU economies.

The situation in Cyprus "has the potential to rekindle the financial crisis in the peripheral countries which had been rather calm lately," said a report from JBC Energy in Vienna.

Others said market reaction was relatively subdued, especially compared with similar events in previous years.

Analysts at Frankfurt's Commerzbank, while noting that "the upside potential is likely to remain limited" until

the uncertainty over Cyprus subsidies, also pointed out that the lack of alternative investment opportunities could support crude prices.

"The continuing high liquidity among investors, coupled with their willingness to take risks, is likely to lend support also to the commodities markets in the coming months," Commerzbank said.

U.S. housing data released Tuesday provided more signs that the U.S. economy seems to be picking up speed, which provided support for oil prices.

The Commerce Department said builders broke ground on homes last month at a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 917,000, up from 910,000 in January and the second-fastest pace in four years.

Building permits also increased in February, rising by 4.6 percent to 946,000. That was the most since June 2008.

Investors will also be monitoring fresh information on U.S. stockpiles of crude and

refined products.

Data for the week ending March 15 is expected to show a build of 2 million barrels in crude oil stocks and a draw of 2.5 million barrels in gasoline stocks, according to a survey of analysts by Platts, the energy information arm of McGraw-Hill Cos.

The American Petroleum Institute will release its report on oil stocks later Tuesday, while the report from the Energy Department's Energy Information Administration — the market benchmark — will be out on Wednesday.

Brent crude, used to price many kinds of oil imported by U.S. refineries, was down 35 cents to \$109.16 per barrel on the ICE Futures exchange in London.

In other energy futures trading on the Nymex:

— Wholesale gasoline lost 0.68 cent to \$3.1108 a gallon.

— Heating oil fell 1.04 cents to \$3.021 a gallon.

— Natural gas rose 0.5 cent to \$3.887 per 1,000 cubic feet.

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