

## State and National

# Economy probably won't fail despite century's worst drought

By **ANDREW LAWLER**  
Staff Writer

Much of the United States is in the grip of a drought and a heat wave of record highs in more than 12 states, eclipsing even the Dust Bowl conditions of the 1930s. Although last weekend brought cooler temperatures to much of the country, little moisture was reported, and the heat is expected to return by this weekend.

"The jet stream has split in half; as a result, an abnormally high pressure system has been parked over the Central United States. Therefore, storm systems have been steered away from the Central U.S. and up to Canada," said Jim Wagner, a meteorologist with the climate prediction division of the National Weather Service in Washington, D.C., explaining the immediate cause of the drought.

Low-level air currents have also kept Gulf of Mexico moisture from reaching hard-hit areas, he said, and hot air has been kept aloft due to the warmer ground, resulting in less active thunderstorms.

Hardest hit have been the Corn Belt and the Northern and Central Plains. High temperatures and greatly reduced rainfall have combined in these areas to the point where they threaten the survival of corn and wheat crops. This comes at a critical time for the crop cycle; seeds need

to take root and germinate, but without the moisture whole crops are ending up stunted and dead. Hay and meal shortages have forced livestock farmers to sell their herds months early, which results in reduced meat prices now but could push prices up later in the year.

"The crops could rebound if there is enough rain, although traditionally July is worse than June," said Michael Duff, policy adviser with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. "However, as of now, according to our Range and Pasture Index, moisture is the lowest it's been since 1934, the worst drought year this century."

But the drought should not have the same effects as in 1934, he said. "It's doubtful that the country will see a repeat of those times economically. The country is in excellent economic condition; farm prices will rise for those farmers who have a crop, and the government will probably help out the farmers."

The drought has also forced the Army Corps of Engineers to engage in emergency dredging for the last two weeks on the Mississippi River.

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Richard Ledy has been meeting with governors of affected states to coordinate relief efforts, and the Senate Agriculture Committee has formed a special task force to deal with the drought, led by Sen. Patrick Leahy,

D-Vt. The committee "will continue to implement options in dealing with the drought, such as opening federal lands for grazing, emergency feed programs and perhaps loan relief," said spokesman Patrick Collins.

The committee will also investigate long-term causes of the drought, looking especially at the greenhouse effect that scientists have said is a main cause. The greenhouse theory states that pollution and other like causes have put too much carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, resulting in a heat trap similar to the one in a greenhouse. Scientists predict this will result in higher global temperatures and flooding from melting in the polar ice caps.

But Wagner said that may not be the cause of this year's drought.

"The worldwide temperature raises needed to support this theory have just not happened," he said. "There have always been decades of warm, dry years such as the (19)50s, the '30s and now the '80s. The '30s remain the worst drought years, and even then there were normal years. This is probably just another one of those decades."

North Carolina officials are also working to reassure farmers. U.S. Rep. David Price, D-4th, announced the establishment of a toll-free telephone hotline Friday provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to answer questions about federal government relief services available in drought-stricken areas.

N.C. Gov. Jim Martin will also hold a Drought Management Conference today in Asheville with representatives of local governments, water systems operators and state water officials to discuss water conservation steps. Some western counties have already imposed water use restrictions.

# Toll-free AIDS hotline serves North Carolina

By **BOB LUKEFAHR**  
Staff Writer

Ever since it opened June 6, the North Carolina AIDS hotline located in Research Triangle Park, a toll-free number operated by the N.C. Division of Health Services AIDS Control Program, has received a steady stream of inquiries about the deadly disease.

Most of the calls are in response to the federal government's pamphlet "Understanding AIDS," which was mailed out nationally between May 26 and today, according to Sandra Cox, a spokeswoman for the AIDS Control Program.

Cox said a national toll-free number, operated by the American Social Health Association, is listed in the pamphlet and refers callers to the local AIDS hotline.

"During the first couple of days we got a couple of hundred calls, but now it's down to around 35 to 40 calls a day," Cox said. "Overall, it has run very smoothly."

The most commonly asked

questions are about testing, the symptoms of the disease and how it is transmitted, said Cox. "People are just worried about what they've done in the past."

Callers are told that free, anonymous AIDS tests are available to anyone in North Carolina through the N.C. Health Department, she said.

According to Michael Granieri, an official at the American Social Health Association, the national hotline will be phased out by the end of the month, and all future questions will be handled by local outlets.

Cox said the North Carolina hotline, which is staffed Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., will remain in operation at least until July 15, when the Division of Health Services will re-evaluate the need for a hotline.

"Understanding AIDS" brochures are still available, in English or Spanish, by calling the national hotline at 1-800-342-AIDS.)

# Wake Forest likely to host fall presidential debate

By **SHARON KEBSCHULL**  
Editor

Presidential candidates Michael Dukakis and George Bush will probably debate at Wake Forest University Sept. 25, although the candidates have not formally announced the debate.

Wake Forest seniors Scott DuBois, Beth Dawson and Mike Smith have worked since January 1987 with the Washington, D.C.-based Commission on Presidential Debates to get the candidates to Wake Forest,

DuBois said.

"We have every reason to believe we're going to have a debate," DuBois said. "As far as we're concerned, we are planning for something."

Representatives for the candidates refused to confirm the debate but said more information would be available after the party conventions.

"We are making plans to hold a debate," said Kathy Bird, assistant to the executive director of the Commission on Presidential Debates. "We are moving forward with those plans."

A format for the debate will not be decided until after the conventions, DuBois said.

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