

Agriculture

Scorching heat bakes crops in piedmont and western Carolina

No one needed to tell farmers in Piedmont and western North Carolina how dry their fields were. Day after day of relentless, scorching heat and cloudless skies baked crops and the earth in much of North Carolina's fertile counties.

The corn crop was among the first to fall prey to the drought, then the spring wheat, and the pastures, and by the middle of July, thousands of farmers in this state were desperate for relief.

Among the hardest hit were those with dairy, beef or horse operations. While it was possible for some to turn under row crops or cut corn for silage or at least harvest a little wheat, those with horses and cattle were left with animals starving in dying pastures.

The state's poultry farmers lost thousands of birds to the heat of July, and hog farmers lost some animals and watched weight gains diminish on others. But hogs suffered through the worst times, and when temperatures finally fell out of the hundreds, chicken and turkey production returned to "normal" conditions. However, cattle and horse farmers were stuck with hungry animals, too little water and even less feed.

Many beef and dairy cattle herds were thinned as farmers began to sell some livestock. These cattle, many of them bred and carrying calves, were sent to livestock auctions so they would not have to be fed and watered through the toughest drought times.

Farmers fully expected prices to

fall as large numbers of animals came up for auction, but heavy buying in northern and western markets changed the picture. Farmers there bought the cattle for replacement stock instead of allowing them to go to the slaughter. This boosted prices and maintained a strong market.

Likewise, farmers carrying hogs to market were pleased to find a healthy market for their animals. Poultry farmers saw record high prices for their birds by the middle of August, as demand outpaced supply for hogs and chickens.

But the good prices for poultry and livestock didn't help farmers interested in keeping their beef cattle through the winter or in maintaining their dairy herd. Many found themselves in a position where they didn't have enough feed to see their cattle through next week, let alone through the winter.

And this is where the story of love and caring for fellow farmers begins.

Through channels of communication opened by all forms of the media, farmers across the United States became aware of the acute needs of their farming brothers in the south-east.

Offers of help began pouring in, and the North Carolina Department of Agriculture became command center to coordinate bringing free hay into the state for distribution.

Calls came in from states all over the country, with farmers offering

from a few bales of hay to thousands. It seems Mother Nature had been giving North Carolina's share of rainfall to farmers in other areas, and those farmers had hay to spare.

Before long, Departments of Agriculture in responding states, along with countless farmer, church and civic groups had banded together to collect as much hay as possible and facilitate shipment to the Southeast.

Personnel from the Division of Marketing of the North Carolina of Agriculture manned phones from sunrise until after dark, seven days a week to coordinate relieve efforts. Two WATS lines, furnished by Southern Bell and AT&T, aided farmers and truckers who had hay or transportation to donate.

Computers were put into service to match donated hay with transportation offers. Nine distribution sites across the hardest hit areas of the state were selected and readied for hay shipments. Personnel from the Division of Marketing and other divisions within the NCDA were pressed into service to receive and account for distribution of hay from the sites.

And even before the gifts of love in the form of hay began arriving, farmers in North Carolina were clogging the phone lines wanting to know where they could get free hay, or even if someone knew where hay could be bought at a reasonable price. And the answer was always the same...make application through your local Extension office and wait for hay to arrive.

It wasn't long before hay began

arriving. At first by plane, to fill the critical immediate need, courtesy of the Air National Guard, through the Pentagon. And later the hay rolled into North Carolina on trucks and in trains, with prison labor used to unload the hay and place it in the distribution sites.

Companies donated trucks, trains and fuel, and drivers and engineers volunteered their time to bring hay to North Carolina. Permits were waived by neighboring states to allow the trucks to travel without highway tolls, and unit trains and individual rail cars brought hay into the state as thousands stood beside the tracks waving as the trains passed.

There were some critics who

pointed to the total need of hay for livestock to make it through the winter, and that all the shipments of free hay together barely made a dent in that total need.

But what the critics failed to see, or at least recognize, was that farmers in North Carolina weren't expecting farmers in other states to provide them with enough free hay to make it through the winter. They only needed enough hay to make it through the critical drought period, giving their pastures enough time to recover and begin growing again after the rains came.

No doubt, farmers in this state will buy thousands of tons of hay this winter from hay producers in all parts of

the country. And each time they pick up the phone to order hay, they'll likely have a warm feeling for their farming brother on the other end of the line who provided a little hay free of charge when they needed it most.

And those same farmers will gather this winter at country stores across North Carolina and reminisce about how dry 1986 was, and how much they needed and appreciated those special gifts of hay, and all those who worked so hard to get it to them.

Perhaps Jim Graham, N.C. Commissioner of Agriculture, recognizing that if he tried to thank everyone individually he would leave someone out, summed it up best by saying, "simply thank you, one and all."



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Make the world a more beautiful place, says the Netherlands Flower Bulb Information Center by participating in World Flowerbulb Day was introduced three years ago, sales of Dutch bulbs have increased by 55 percent. This year Holland will send 550 million bulbs to America, the best known being the tulip. Plant at least one and make their day.

The All-American Rose Selections for this year are 'Bonica', 'New Year', and 'Sheer Bliss.'

'Bonica' is an ever-blooming hybrid shrub with pink flowers. It is very col-



orful planted in groups or as a hedge. Flowers are borne in clusters of 20 or more, followed in fall by bright orange rose hips in abundant numbers.

'New Year' is a grandiflora with strikingly different Spanish-orange colored flowers. The flowers have proven themselves to possess excellent form and lasting quality, plus sturdy stems. These qualities should make 'New Year' a world-class cut

flower.

'Sheer Bliss' is aptly named—it's fragrance is unusually strong and sweet. The flowers of this award winning hybrid tea are creamy white, with a soft pink center.

St. Albert Rauber, medical director of the Georgia Poison Control Center, says don't clutch if your child eats an ingamously castor bean. The poor castor bean is much maligned, and has been proven a lot less toxic than suspected. The beans can still make you sick, however, and a physician should be contacted, who will prescribe methods for cleansing the stomach, without having to go to a hospital.

O.M. Scotts, the Lawn people, are offering a new product. This is a lawn supplement to use any time to correct lawn yellowing and provide a light feeding of nitrogen in conjunction with regular fertilizing.

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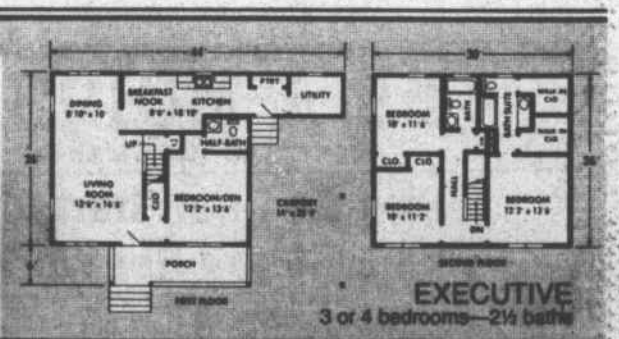


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