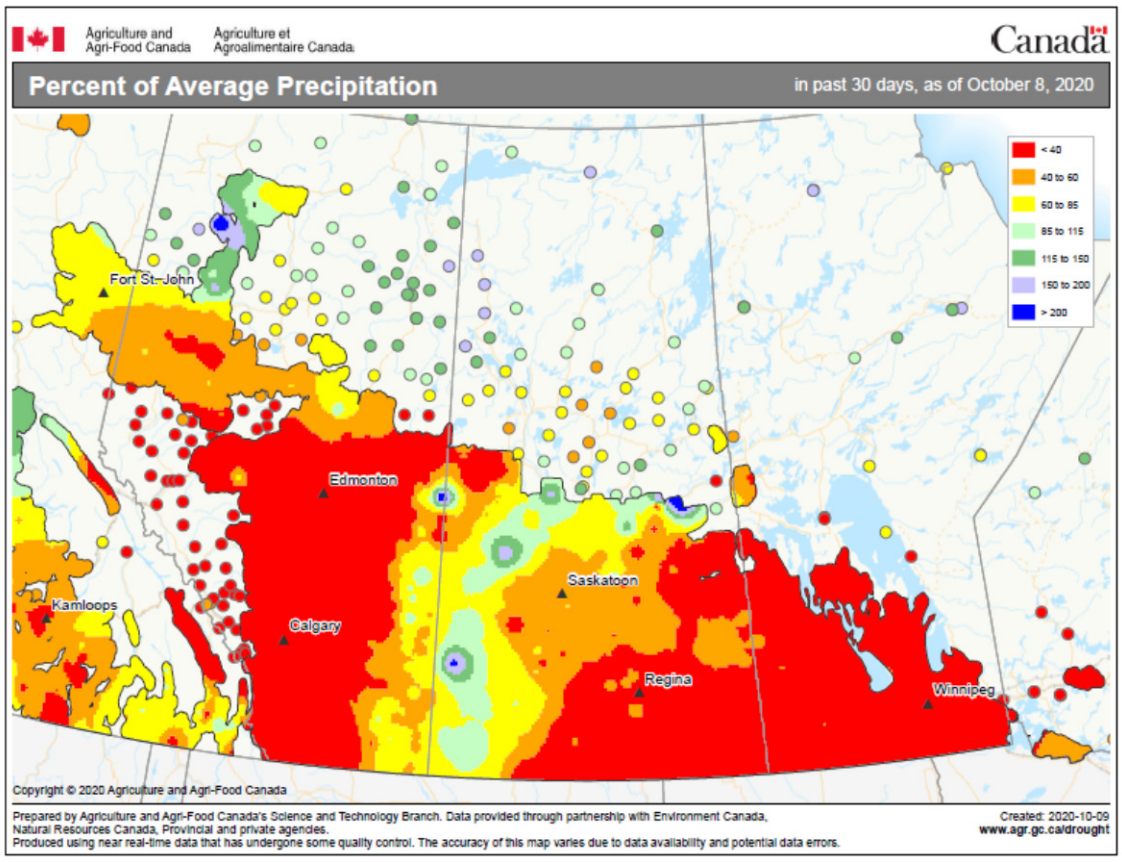
Canadian Prairies Harvesting Finishing Up In Most Locations

By Andrew Owen

Kansas City, October 9 (World Weather Inc.) – ***Much of the Canadian Prairies have seen favorable crop maturation and harvest progress in recent weeks. Fieldwork has advanced ahead of normal with a large portion of Saskatchewan and Manitoba already finished with the harvest. Many areas in Alberta are well ahead of the normal harvest pace as well, although not all areas and there are a few in Manitoba and Saskatchewan that have been dealing with persistent showers and drizzle of limited intensity, but often enough to induce a disruption to fieldwork.*** Outside of the areas still fighting the frequent showers, there is a growing need for moisture across the Prairies before the ground freezes so that there is at least a little moisture in the soil for use next spring. ***Many areas are much too dry for producers to rest comfortably during the winter knowing that there is not much moisture in reserve.*** With that said, there is at least one upper-level disturbance coming across the Prairies this weekend and early next week that will bring erratic precipitation and cooler weather to the Prairies.

A large section of the Prairies were drier or much drier than normal during the past week. However, eastern fringes of Alberta into west-central, southwestern, and north-central Saskatchewan received 60-115% of normal precipitation for the 30-day period ending October 8. Northern fringes of the Peace River region were also wetter than normal, receiving 115-200% of normal precipitation. Rainfall elsewhere was less than 60%.



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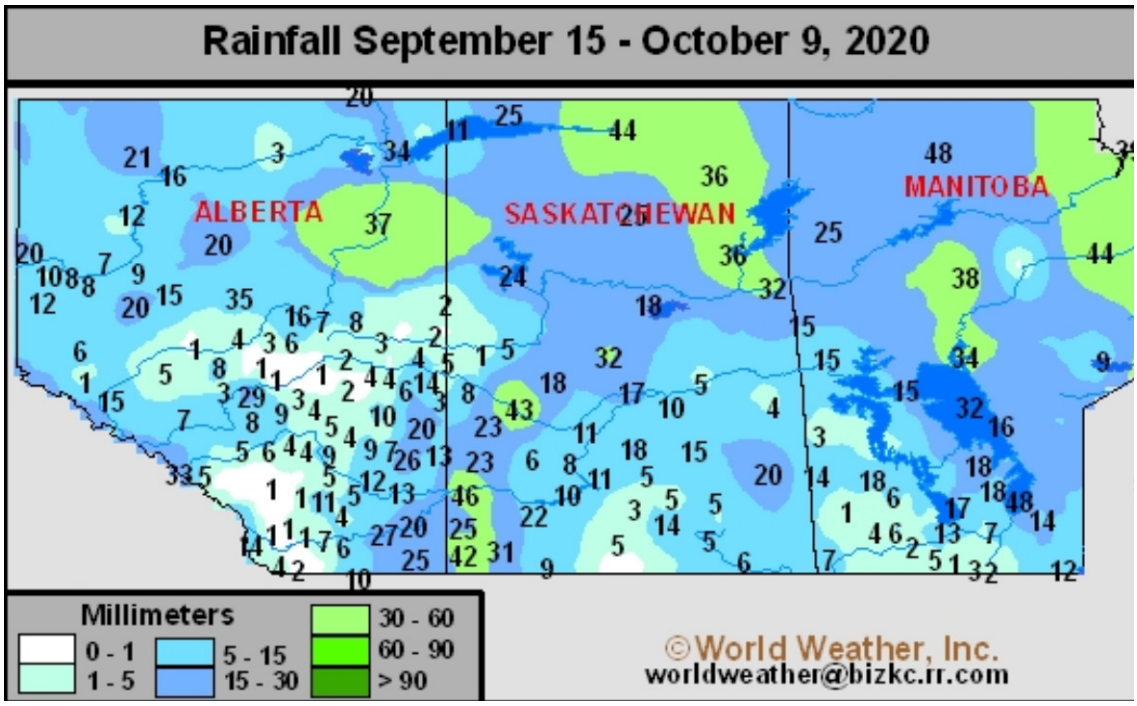
East-central and southeastern Alberta into southwestern, west-central, and north-central Saskatchewan received varying amounts of rain in recent weeks. Rainfall from September 15 – October 9 ranged from 0.47 to 1.81 inches in most locations. The remaining portions of Saskatchewan into west-central, central, and northwestern Manitoba received 0.20-0.79 inch of rain while Northwestern Alberta and pockets in west-central Alberta received 0.24 to 1.14 inches. Little to no precipitation fell elsewhere. ***That much moisture spread out over more than three weeks with warmer-than-usual temperatures did not serve many of the driest areas very well. Most areas experienced net drying except in western Saskatchewan and east-central through southeastern Alberta where the greatest rain fell.***



The lack of significant precipitation and periods of warm weather in recent weeks gradually firmed the topsoil in a large portion of the Prairies. Many areas in southern Alberta and Saskatchewan have very short topsoil moisture at the time of this writing. The topsoil in other portions of the Prairies was rated marginally adequate to short. Subsoil moisture was rated a little better across northern and western Alberta, portions of northwestern and northeastern Saskatchewan and northern Manitoba while still short to very short farther to the south. ***The limited top and subsoil moisture in the southern half of the Prairies is where the crux of the dryness problem lies and some serious prayers are likely to come from the region this winter if conditions do not change soon.***

Harvesting has advanced swiftly in a large portion of the Prairies in recent weeks due to the lack of rain and warm weather. Saskatchewan had 96% of the crop harvested as of October 5, which is up from 76% for the 2015-2019 average. The Manitoba harvest was 88% complete as of October 6, up from 76% for the three-year average. In Alberta, harvesting was 90% complete as of October 6, up from 61% the five-year average and up from 70% in the ten year average. This was the fastest harvest season since 2012 in Alberta.

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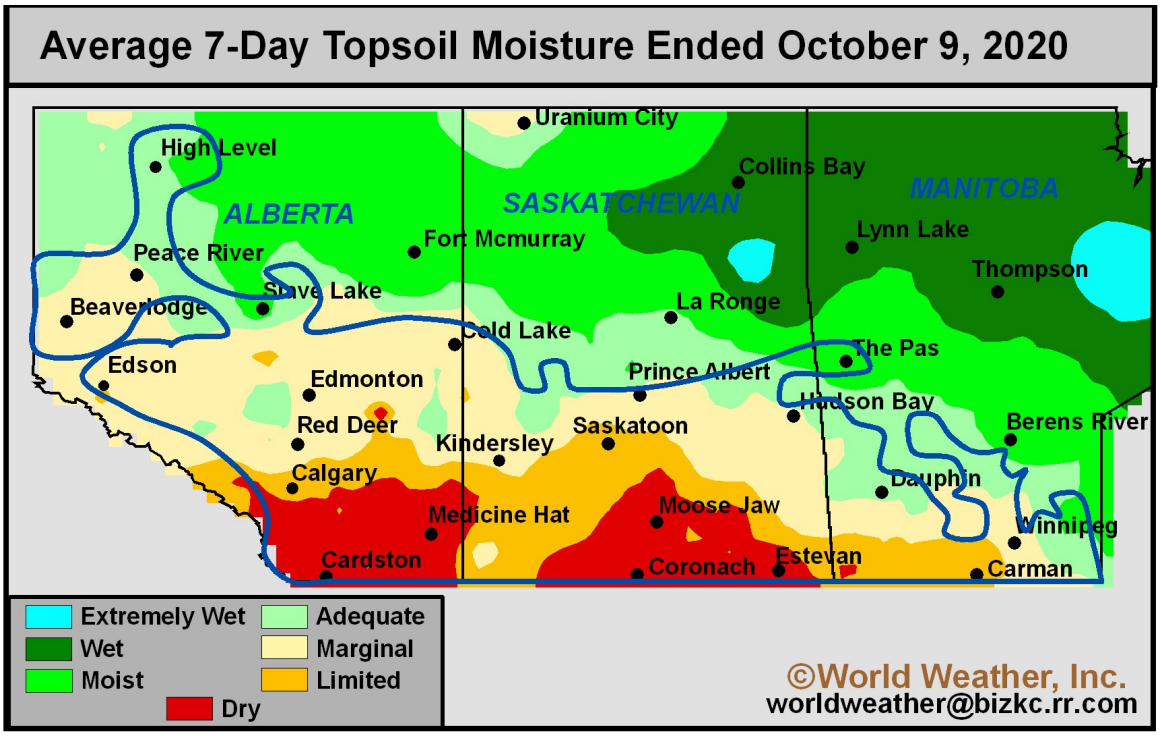
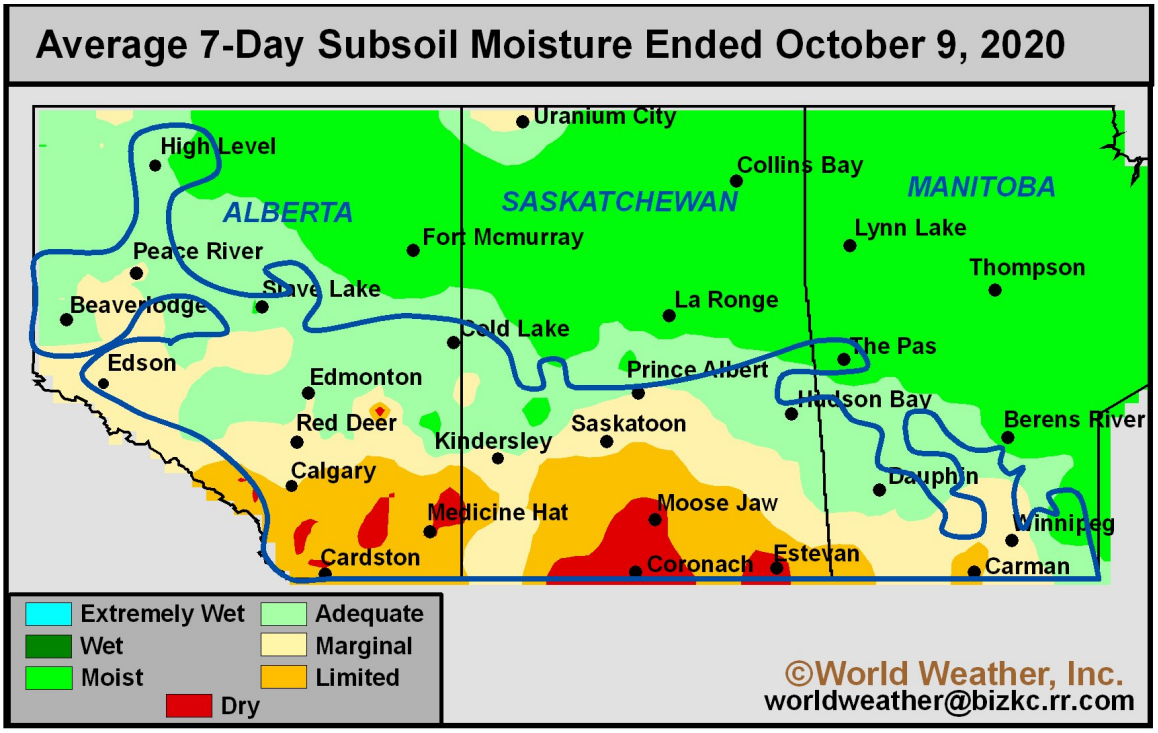
Many producers are reporting near to slightly above average yields and quality for most crops. A cool start to the spring initially limited planting in much of the Prairies. Some of the earlier planted crops in Manitoba and Saskatchewan also saw light frost and freezes after some of the crops emerged, leading to some crop damage. Dryness and heat stress later in the growing season also marginally impacted crops in a few locations, mainly in southern sections of the production region.



Northwestern Alberta and neighboring areas are furthest behind in their harvest. These areas have seen adverse weather during the harvest season for the past four years due to frequent bouts of precipitation and cooler weather. Although these areas are currently well-ahead of normal harvest dates, drier weather is needed in the next few weeks to maintain favorable fieldwork conditions. Other production areas will likely see the harvest wind down during the next week or two around a few late season precipitation events.

The main concern going forward through the end of next week will be for a large upper-level disturbance that passes over the region overnight into early next week. The disturbance will initially promote erratic precipitation for Alberta tonight and Saturday before the main band of precipitation shifts eastward over the Prairies Sunday and Monday. Portions of central and northwestern Alberta into northwestern Saskatchewan will receive 0.25 to 1.00 inch of moisture with locally greater amounts. Precipitation totals in other portions of the Prairies will generally range from trace amounts to 0.50 inch with locally greater amounts in east-central Alberta and west-central Saskatchewan. Cooler air in the backside of the disturbance will also help promote periods of light snow and freezing rain, most notably in Alberta and Saskatchewan. Pockets in northern Saskatchewan will see a dusting to 1 inch of snow accumulate with locally greater amounts in northeastern Saskatchewan and northwestern Manitoba. However, little to no snow accumulation is expected in the remaining portions of the Prairies. Another disturbance will likely bring

erratic precipitation to portions of Alberta and southwestern Saskatchewan Tuesday and Wednesday while most other production areas are dry. A brief period of mostly dry weather will then evolve later next week.



Although temperatures will trend near to slightly above normal today and Saturday, cooler air behind the upper-level disturbance will spread across the region later this weekend and early next week. Cold air will then linger over the Prairies through the end of next week as the upper-level disturbance stalls near the Hudson Bay. Daytime highs will drop to the 40s and 50s Fahrenheit in much of the Prairies next week.

The precipitation and cooler weather over the weekend and next week will likely slow or delay the harvest in many production areas. Producers will still have opportunities to get into the fields between precipitation events, though harvest prospects will be less than ideal at times. Drying rates will also be limited next week and may extend fieldwork delays. Many farmers will likely make significant progress with the harvest during the next few days before the precipitation occurs. However, northwestern Alberta and neighboring areas will need to see drier and warmer weather return to get the remainder of the crop out of the ground.

Once harvesting is complete, the main focus will shift to precipitation potentials. Significant precipitation will be needed to recharge soil moisture before the ground freezes. Continued dryness in the coming weeks may raise concern over the potential for a slow start to the planting season in spring 2021.

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