

# Mud

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in the field," said 74-year-old Iowa farmer Jerry Main, who plants corn and soybeans on about 500 acres in the southeast part of the state. He's measured more than 9 inches of rain since April 18 — and farmers in his area prefer to plant corn by May 10 — at the latest.

Aside from being too wet to plant, it's been too cold for seed to germinate. Main said temperatures dipped to 27 on Tuesday and to 32 on Wednesday, a chill that's been widespread across the Midwest.

"We need some heat, it's been down in the upper 30s at night," said Darren Walter, 41, who farms near Grand Ridge, Ill. And farmers in southwest Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas have lost a significant portion of their wheat crop because of unusually late freezes, and have begun knocking it down to feed it to livestock.

But just as better crop technology helped U.S. farmers har-

vest one of their biggest corn crops ever amid the worst drought in decades, it's likely to save them from a late, wet planting season. There are corn varieties that mature faster, nearly 30 days in some cases, but the shorter the time to maturity, the lower the yield.

Kevin Malchine, who farms 2,100 acres in southeastern Wisconsin, said he did better than expected last year thanks to drought-resistant corn — harvesting 80 percent more than in 1988, the last time there was a comparable drought.

"We took a hit, but it was much better than I would have thought, and that's just due to the genetics of today," Malchine, 51, said.

Sandy Ludeman's 2,500-acre farm in Tracy, Minn., about 50 miles east of the South Dakota border, is covered with snow. A year ago, he had finished planting corn. This year, he'll be lucky if he can start in two weeks.

Ludeman says he'll consider switching from his typical 105-day corn to 95-day corn if planting runs late.

"I guess I'm not abnormally

concerned about it," he said. "I've farmed close to 40 years, and we've had wet springs before, but if it gets too late, it affects our yield."

Declaring an end to drought requires looking at how much moisture an area has received, how much soaked into the ground and the impact on agriculture, said Richard Heim, a climate scientist at the National Climatic Data Center who helps draft the drought monitor.

"It takes a while for that moisture to percolate down especially if it's been dry for a long time," he said. "When the soil is moist enough it can sustain crops, it can sustain other activities you aren't really in a drought."

In Illinois, where corn production plunged 34 percent last year, soggy conditions meant only 1 percent of it has been sown this year.

Rob Asbell farms 5,000 acres of corn and soybeans with his dad and uncle in Peoria County in central Illinois. The last week brought more than 6 inches of rain, saturating the fields and putting him woefully behind.

"Everybody's behind," the 42-

year-old said. "We're getting to the point now where it's time to go, tired of sitting around."

The dry spell hasn't snapped everywhere, though. It remains solidly in place in parts of California, Colorado, Kansas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas, according to the drought monitor. It intensified across western Texas, southeastern New Mexico and the Oklahoma panhandle.

It likely won't keep farmers out of the fields, though. Agriculture giant Monsanto tested a drought-resistant variety of corn last year, and DuPont Pioneer and Syngenta are also marketing similar varieties.

Southwest Kansas farmer Clay Scott said he was one of 250 to test Monsanto's during last year's drought and said it yielded more bushels per gallon of water than his fully irrigated corn. He plans to plant about 10 percent of the drought-resistant corn this year, noting that things are again looking extremely dry.

"The countryside's hurting every time the wind blows," he said. "It's really starting to be an issue with blowing dirt," he said.

# Minn. Man Gets Most Severe Charge In Teens' Deaths

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — A central Minnesota man accused of killing two unarmed teenagers, shooting them multiple times as they tried to break into his home, has been indicted on first-degree murder charges, prosecutors announced Thursday.

A Morrison County grand jury indicted Byron Smith, 64, on Wednesday on two counts of first-degree murder with premeditation in the Nov. 22 deaths of 17-year-old Nick Brady and 18-year-old Haile Kifer. Initially, Smith was charged with two counts of second-degree murder.

The new charges, issued under seal Wednesday, were announced after a Thursday court appearance. In order to bring someone to trial for first-degree murder in Minnesota, a grand jury indictment must be issued. If convicted, Smith faces a mandatory penalty of life in prison without parole.

"We look forward to proving this case ... and bringing justice

to these two high school students whose lives were so violently and prematurely ended," Washington County Attorney Pete Orput said in a statement. Orput is handling the case because Morrison County prosecutors cited a conflict of interest.

One of Smith's attorneys, Adam Johnson, said Smith was acting in self-defense and was defending his dwelling, in rural Little Falls. Under Minnesota law, a person may use deadly force to prevent a felony from taking place in one's home or dwelling.

According to a criminal complaint, Smith, a retired U.S. State Department employee, told authorities he feared the teens had a weapon when they entered his home on Thanksgiving Day and acknowledged firing "more shots than I needed to." He also told investigators he fired "a good clean finishing shot" into Kifer's head as she was gasping for air, the complaint said.

# Transit

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have to take (that their children could be riding with adults)," she stated. "That will make it much easier because then you're not dealing with expectations that are different from what we can provide."

A chance exists that the agency won't have to change the way it transports children. On Thursday, the Yankton Transit board made a decision to pursue an exemption process wherein the FTA would allow it to continue providing exclusive bus service.

Bentson admitted that it will be difficult to obtain the exemption and said she doesn't know how long the process will take to unfold. Part of it will include advertising for proposals from private bus companies who may be interested in busing the children.

"I'm hoping with the outcry that has occurred and people watching, the situation will be given some priority," Bentson said.

Despite the recent heightened focus on Yankton Transit and the stress involved, Bentson said she loves her job.

"Many of the individuals we take don't have a car like you and I do," she stated. "We can get in the car and go to work, lunch with a friend or wherever. Our riders plan these trips a day in advance. They have no other means to travel."

A transit vehicle will go to the client's house, pick them up and drop them off at their destination for \$2 a ride.

"When they need a ride home, we send the closest bus to get them," Bentson said. "They are so appreciative. They pass that on to the drivers, and then the drivers feel rewarded and share the stories with me. It's a good service, and it touches people's lives."

In 2012, 42 percent of Yankton Transit's ridership was children, 19 percent was senior citizens, 18 percent was considered "other," 10 percent was Ability Building Services clients and 8 percent was Lewis and Clark Mental Health clients.

A total of 25 people are employed by Yankton Transit, many of them on a part-time basis. Fifteen vehicles are housed in the organization's headquarters at 901 East Seventh St.

One good outcome of the recent events is that more people have taken notice of Yankton Transit and realized its worth to the community, Bentson stated.

"When something like this happens, it wakes people up and they realize, 'This is important to us,'" she said. "I think people are paying attention to the importance of transit within their community."

You can follow Nathan Johnson on Twitter at [Twitter.com/AnInlandVoyage](https://twitter.com/AnInlandVoyage)

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