

Commentary

# A Winter Forecast: Some Dry Thoughts

BY RITA BRHEL  
P&D Correspondent

I took a short trot into my neighbor's corn field this afternoon. I was trespassing for a good cause, though. An empty poultry feed bag had blown into the field from our farmyard about a week ago. The bag was caught in the stalks just 20 or so feet from the ditch, and it caught my eye



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every change it got — wearing me down — but I had to wait for the neighbor to move his cows out of the stalks so I didn't have to wrangle a hot wire on my anti-litter quest. Today was the day!

So, as I was dashing down the corn row to retrieve the bag — moving as quickly as possible over the ground made uneven by cattle compaction — I glanced down between footfalls to inspect the soil. My quick glances confirmed what I've been seeing on the U.S. Drought Monitor: only slightly dry, if at all.

According to the Drought Monitor, the entire Yankton area — on both sides of the river — is free from drought. I'm a little more south, so I may be in an abnormally dry area but it's at the least severe level. Soil moisture is looking good.

It's nice to have a break from troublesome drought, but as we give our thanksgiving for good weather this year, let's not forget those in California that are now experiencing an exceptional drought, the most severe level. It's not just that we have been in their shoes, and will be again, but also that California's poor fortune is impacting fellow producers. They may not be growing the same crops and livestock, but they share in feeding the world. We are all together in this venture called agriculture, and one state's plight should be just as much our concern as our own. After all, during our own severe drought, farmers and ranchers from other states came to our aid — whether it was providing emergency hay stores or offering up prayers for relief.

Looking ahead, climate predictions this winter look to be favorable for precipitation chances where I live and the southern counties of the Yankton area in northeast Nebraska, with equal chances for abundant moisture or more dryness in southeast South Dakota. This is at least through April and possibly into May.

But will that moisture predicted be snow? I'm all for moisture, and I think new-fallen snow is very pretty, but I would rather have rain than "snirt" — snow mixed with dirt — stick around for months on end. And nothing can ground my week's plans faster than icy roads. But, on the other hand, I'd rather fight through three feet of snow for weeks on end rather than have a dry winter and emerge in the spring too dry for the crops.

Well, climate predictions show that with that increased chance of precipitation, the temperatures across the entire Yankton area are likely to be above normal. I thought 60-degree temperatures in January were great last year — though it did seem a little odd, too — and it looks like warmer-than-historically typical winter days are likely again this next year, through about May.

But while precipitation chances cannot be estimated by climate predictions for the end of 2016, there is a prediction for below-normal temperatures at the end of next year. So perhaps we should enjoy the warm winter while we have it!



PHOTO: RITA BRHEL

# Talking Turkey?

## More People Are Keeping Backyard Chickens, But Turkeys Could Also Be Part Of The Conversation

*EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the first of a two-part series on backyard turkeys.*

BY RITA BRHEL  
P&D Correspondent

With the rising popularity of keeping backyard chickens, many poultry owners at some point consider branching out to other species of farm birds.

Thanksgiving puts many in the mood for raising turkeys at home. "Turkeys aren't as warm and fuzzy as chickens are, but they have their own characteristics," said David Frame, poultry specialist with Utah State University at Logan, Utah, who spoke during an online November class for backyard poultry owners just getting started with turkeys. "A turkey is not a chicken," he added. "They have anatomy, physiology, psychology and environmental differences."

Turkeys are attractive as a backyard poultry pick in their own right — likely none so much as being the iconic meat dish of Thanksgiving, and how good would a homegrown turkey taste in the center of the family table?

Turkeys have long been a staple food in the American diet, with Native Americans having semi-domesticated the native turkey more than 2,000 years ago. By the 16th Century, turkeys were a common dish for Christmas meals.

But it wasn't until Norman Rockwell's "Freedom from Want" oil painting released in 1943 that turkey became known as the exemplary main dish of Thanksgiving, more than half a century after

President Abraham Lincoln declared the national holiday in 1883. The Rockwell scene features a grandmother proudly placing a platter with a whole roasted turkey in the middle of a formally set table surrounded by her family.

Today, more than 17.5 million pounds of turkey are consumed each year worldwide, with the United States and Canada at the top of the list of

harder to see than brown pin feathers, making the dressed turkey more appealing to consumers.

However, white turkeys cannot be raised outside because they are vulnerable to temperature differences — although, Frame added, keeping poultry outside is discouraged now anyway because of the Avian Influenza outbreak.

While there continues to be small pockets of almost-true to true heritage breeds being raised by small growers, the majority of so-called heritage breeds available through commercial hatcheries for backyard flocks have some characteristics of commercial breeding. Therefore, the general recommendation is raise them

the same as the white commercial breed. For example, poults — the term for young turkeys — are typically brooded for 4 to 5 weeks until fully fledged and able to maintain their own body heat, and then moved to grow-out buildings.

The toms and hens — male and female turkeys, respectively — are also typically raised separately once they are moved to the grow-out buildings.

"Interestingly, the hens do pretty well in a tom flock, but a tom gets beaten up in a hen flock," Frame said.

Compared to chickens, turkeys tend to require more intensive care as poults, whether toms or hens.

"They have a tendency to look for ways to commit suicide more than chickens do, so you have to think about that," Frame said. "It's part of that psychological difference from chickens."

### "A turkey is not a chicken. They have anatomy, physiology, psychology and environment differences."

DAVID FRAME

consumers, and Israel closely following.

Turkey is so popular in the United States that it is here that the world's commercial breeds have been developed.

"The modern turkey is bred to grow rapidly," Frame said. By 17 weeks, the average hen weighs 23.5 pounds and the average tom weighs 35 pounds.

While commercial breeding has greatly increased efficiency of turkey production, it does mandate more intensive production practices even in backyard flocks.

"Up until the 1960s, the bronze turkey was the turkey that was raised commercially and you would buy in the store," Frame said. "These birds were tough. They could be raised and kept outdoors."

Commercial breeding eventually favored the white bird, because the white pin feathers are

## Grandin Featured At 2015 S.D. Farmers Union State Convention

HURON — Dr. Temple Grandin, the renowned animal handling researcher, livestock facility designer and author, is the keynote for the South Dakota Farmers Union State Convention held Dec. 9-10 in Huron at the Crossroads Convention Center (100 4th St. SW).

"When Farmers Union brought Temple Grandin to the state in 2014 the response was so amazing, we wanted to bring her back," says Karla Hofhenke, SDFU Executive Director.

Grandin will speak at 1:30 p.m. Dec. 9. The public is invited to attend at no charge.

### A CENTURY STRONG

This State Convention will be South Dakota Farmers Union's centennial celebration as 2015 marks a century of service to South Dakota family farmers, ranchers and rural communities.

"We are 100 years old and have a lot to celebrate," Somke said. "This historical milestone says a lot about the strength, loyalty and foresight of our membership. Because of the grassroots efforts of our members, we have plowed through some tough times in South Dakota agriculture, as well as reaped the rewards of our labor."

Along with Grandin's presentation, during the two-day convention members

will hear from S.D. Executive Director of the Farm Service Agency, Craig Schaanaman; hear from rodeo athlete and motivational speaker, Amberley Snyder; and discuss policy which will guide the focus of the organization moving forward.

Policy like the Independent Redistricting Commission which will be on the 2016 ballot thanks to Farmers Union members who voted on amending the State Constitution during the 2014 state convention. Farmers Union led the charge, together with volunteers from organizations across the state, to gather more than 40,400 signatures to put the Independent Redistricting Commission on ballot.

"Redistricting reform impacts all South Dakotans," Sombke says. "This issue, like many of the issues our membership develops our policy around, is an issue which impacts not only our membership, but all South Dakotans. By attending Convention, you get to be in on the development of our grassroots policy."

Throughout the convention, members will also have an opportunity to browse through Farmers Union memorabilia saved in the state archive and on loan from members.

### RAISING FUNDS FOR YOUTH EDUCATION

The centennial convention will wrap up with entertainment from Williams and Ree during the annual A Night on the Prairie Event which raises funds for the SDFU Foundation. All proceeds go to youth educational programs. Each year, more than 3,000 South Dakota youth participate in Farmers Union youth programming which highlights cooperatives, farm safety and leadership development.

For tickets to attend A Night on the Prairie Event, contact Karla Hofhenke, SDFU Executive Director at [Khofhenke@sdfu.org](mailto:Khofhenke@sdfu.org) or call 605-352-6761 ext. 114. For a complete convention agenda and more details, visit [www.sdfu.org](http://www.sdfu.org).

## Ag Producers Should Weigh CRP Opportunities

LINCOLN, Neb. — Agriculture producers are encouraged to visit their local Farm Service Agency (FSA) office to see what continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) opportunities are available.

Continuous CRP is a great option for those areas of a farm that are underperforming or difficult to farm. This is also a great time to consider enrollment in the General CRP Sign-up, which starts Dec. 1.

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and other partners offer a variety of additional incentives that can make CRP a good business decision.

There are practices available to fit every operation. Among them is the Highly Erodible Land Initiative, which can improve water and air quality, as well as provide wildlife habitat. Another practice, the Nebraska State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement, aims to enhance habitat for bobwhite quail and greater prairie-chickens. CRP doesn't just benefit these species; deer, turkeys and waterfowl also thrive.

CRP assists farmers, ranchers and other ag producers to use their environmentally sensitive land for conservation benefits. As a result, CRP has provided economically viable solutions for producers and valuable habitat for wildlife.

Call or visit your local FSA office for more information.

AM 1450

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