

## 'Tis The (Harvest) Season



KELLY HERTZ/P&D

Recent dry conditions across the Upper Plains have been a real boost for the harvest. This soybean field near Utica was being worked earlier this week. However, the dry conditions have also create conditions ripe for fire danger. The Yankton area was in the low category of the grassland Fire Danger Index Friday.

# The Dead Zone

## Local Farming Can Have An Impact On The 'Dead Zone' In The Gulf Of Mexico

BY RITA BRHEL  
P&D Correspondent

The Gulf of Mexico may be five states away, but local farm management choices can have a collective impact on life in this marine ecosystem.

Midwest farming had a significant part in creating a 6,474-square-mile hypoxia area off the coast of Texas and Louisiana this year, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in Washington, D.C. This is triple the size of the target of 1,900 square miles, as set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Mississippi River-Gulf of Mexico Hypoxia Task Force also based in Washington, D.C.

The size of Connecticut and Rhode Island combined, this "dead zone" is an area of ocean with low to no oxygen that is unable to support marine life, resulting in massive fish kills. The Gulf hypoxia area is the second-largest of the world's 550 annual dead zones, each of which is considered a major injury to marine conservation.

This year's dead zone is both larger than average and larger than the 5,000 square miles that was forecasted, thanks to heavy June rains throughout the Mississippi River watershed, which includes the Yankton area. The Missouri River eventually flows into Mississippi River, which empties into the Gulf, taking with it sediment and nutrient runoff from agricultural activities — and, but to a lesser extent, urban and industrial activities — as far north as Montana. Dead zones are formed when an area of the ocean contains too much nitrogen and phosphorus, which causes phytoplankton to overgrow and consume all of the oxygen available.

"Since the [prediction] models are based largely on the May nitrogen loads from the Mississippi River, the heavy rains that came in June with additional nitrogen and even higher river discharges in July are the possible explanations for the larger size," said Nancy Rabalais, executive director of the Louisiana Universities Marine Consortium in Chauvin, La., in a NOAA press release. She led the 2015 survey to measure the dead zone from July 28 to Aug. 3.

The largest-ever Gulf dead zone was in 2002 at nearly 8,500 square miles, and



IMAGE: METRO GRAPHICS

the smallest-ever was in 1988 at 15 square miles. The average size of the dead zone during the past five years has been 5,500 square miles.

Both crop and livestock farming has been implicated in contributing to the Gulf dead zone, but particularly tillage, which can promote runoff. Iowa, Illinois, Indiana and Missouri are the largest contributors of agricultural runoff to the Gulf.

South Dakota and Nebraska only contribute up to 5 percent of nitrogen to the

dead zone, but collectively, every state must do its part in order to aim to reduce the Gulf hypoxia area to the targeted 1,900 square miles, said Jamie Benning, watershed specialist at Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa, during a September webinar hosted by the Women in Ag Learning Network.

As a result, Gulf hypoxia reduction strategies were established in 1997.

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### Commentary

## Safety Is Vital During The Harvest Season

BY LUCAS LENTSCH  
SD Secretary of Agriculture

In South Dakota, we know how rewarding it is to be involved in agriculture. For many in our great state, no time is more fulfilling than harvest season. It's that exciting time of year when, after many months of hard work and patience, farmers and ranchers finally get to see the fruits of their labor.

While harvest is exciting, it also has the potential to be a dangerous time of year. We often see combines and other farm equipment traveling down our roadways as farmers move from field to field, bringing in this year's bounty. This equipment is much larger than the vehicles many of us are used to sharing the road with and they move much slower. When you see farm equipment on the roadways, please be cautious. You might catch up with it more quickly than you think. Always take your time when moving around this equipment. Most operators will gladly give you enough space to safely pass if you give them the opportunity to move to the side of the road. Taking those extra few minutes are worth it to ensure that everyone arrives at their destinations safely.

As we've seen in recent weeks, there is also the threat of fire during harvest. Dry, windy weather makes conditions ripe for fast-moving fires in our fields. Look after, and be helpful to, your neighbors if they find themselves in trouble. It is also essential to give fire and emergency crews the space they need to do their jobs.

This time of year also means harvesting of livestock. Animals are being moved closer to home. Cows and calves are being separated and animals are being sorted off to be sold. As you travel the state, you might also come upon a cattle drive. If you're lucky enough to witness a drive, please remember that people, animals and vehicles will all be moving slowly down roadways. Please be alert and patient. Take in the sight. It's an awesome part of our tradition and culture here in South Dakota. In no time, the path to your destination will be cleared and you can move along with your day.

As the harvest comes in, I ask everyone to be a little extra patient. When you come upon farm equipment or a cattle drive on the roadway, take a few extra minutes to slow down in our fast-paced world. Let's work together to make it a safe harvest for everyone.



Lentzsch

### Commentary

## Ready For Winter? Another Growing Season Winds Down

BY RITA BRHEL  
P&D Correspondent

The corn field across the road from my house is still standing, but it is one of the few left. The soybean field to the east of our property line is cut, and the ladybugs and no-see-'em gnats that made it their home are not at our home. So far, I'm keeping up on getting them out of my house as quickly as they come in, but it wouldn't take much for their pace to overwhelm mine.

Our garden is all done. My husband picked the last of the tomatoes while I was at my weekly Bible study and processed them into juice. I feel good about it, though,

as our freezer is brimming with frozen green and wax beans, corn, pasta sauce and apples — our bounty for the year.

We also split a beef with my parents, which they had processed into ground meat, seasoned beef sticks, bologna and jerky. We still had a few lamb roasts left, and our hens have not yet molted so we continue to get eggs



Rita BRHEL

daily. It's nice to have a variety of protein sources to choose from, and it's a luxury for me to eat naturally very lean ground beef from the ranch rather than navigate through the much fattier ground beef options at the local grocery store. I grew up on ground meat that was easily at least 95 percent lean, so even that 85 percent at the store is hard to stomach. I do not like having to drain my ground meat after cooking it in the skillet to get the extra fat off.

It feels really good to get to the end of the growing season and feel like we're ready for winter to come. All of the poultry houses are battened up and ready. There is still

plenty of roughage in the pastures. The fences are all done. My husband mowed the yard for the last time, took out the dead fruit trees and picked up sticks and branches in all of the pastures. All that is left is to put up the garden hoses and modify the rabbit barn to better withstand the winter drafts. To me, it feels too easy this time of the year. I wonder if that bodes a hard winter?

This year, we let the ducks into the garden at the end of the season. Because we operate a sustainable farm, in my mind, all of the animals here that require cash input — in this case, purchased feed — must, in some way, work

for their dinner. The ducks have not been paying their rent. We had hoped to butcher some, but in our limited knowledge of ducks, we chose ducks that seem to be mostly feathers and aren't worth the time to pluck them. We plan to sell them and purchase another breed, but my husband had the idea that they could "work for us" by cleaning up the garden.

I suppose those ducks did something. They seemed to really like crabgrass seed, if nothing else, and I think they developed an affinity for tomatoes. But what

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