

Moisture may be in short supply

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Herald photo by Ian Martens

Drew Lerner, president and senior agricultural meteorologist with World Weather Inc., speaks on the prairies weather outlook during the two-day Farming Smarter conference last week at Lethbridge Lodge.

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It was a banner year for agriculture in 2013.

Nearly every commodity flourished, as a slow start to the season was followed by perfect weather for the rest of the year, and rainfall which came at optimal times.

But according to a weather expert from Kansas City, those conditions are not likely to continue into 2014, and it may leave growers in this part of the Prairies a little short on moisture next season.

“I think one of the main things I was trying to do was heighten the awareness that we are losing moisture in this part of the Prairies,” said Drew Lerner of World Weather Inc., as he made reference to his talk at the 2013 Farming Smarter conference in Lethbridge recently. “Here on the western Prairies we’ve had some drier conditions but we’ve always managed to have that timely precipitation, and we’ve gotten used to that.”

Lerner added agricultural producers may have to adjust to a new reality.

“Those patterns are showing signs of tiring, and if they do, dry conditions could fester.”

Even though this area has received a fair bit of precipitation in the last 30 days, which is good news, Lerner said this area could still experience a dry spring, which he added won't solve the moisture deficit present in the soil.

"We'll probably go into spring with a little bit of a drier flavour," he said, and added a number of different sources point to an existing moisture deficit for parts of Alberta and Saskatchewan "We've always had timely moisture, so the deficits don't fester into a more serious situation."

Lerner is currently assessing summer weather for the area as well, and while his most educated predictions won't be made for quite some time, he said farmers should expect a few more challenges.

"I do see enough signs of potential changes and the perfect weather of 2013 won't happen in 2014."

He's not sounding any alarm bells at this point, despite concerns about moisture levels, as Lerner added nothing in his summer weather outlook currently points to a hot and dry summer for this area. In fact, he added his research up to now points to cooler-than-normal summer temperatures.