Muddy roads were a welcomed sight Sunday morning after the area saw significant rainfall from Saturday's storms.

By Sheri Hink

The Wauneta Breeze

Rolling thunder, wind and lightning were welcomed Saturday night as they were accompanied by much needed rainfall.

After weeks of temperatures hovering around or above 100 degrees with little rainfall, the rain last weekend was cause for celebration.

Rain totals varied throughout the area. The Nebraska rain website lists Max with the highest rain total at 3.55 inches. Hamlet reported 2.14 inches and on the north divide 2 inches.

Although there is not an official recorder of precipitation in the town of Wauneta many people around town have reported 1.5 inches from their personal rain gauges.

Enough to save dryland corn crops?

The new question is, did the rain come soon enough to save the area's dryland corn crops?

Frenchman Valley Co-op Agronomy Division Manager Cleve Anderson says the recent rain has helped–especially eco-fallow corn–but we're going to have to wait and see what yields will look like.

"This rain was a life saver, but it will take a fair bit more to save my crop," Stuart Bartels said.

Rod Wheeler echoed Bartels' comments, "The rain helped tremendously and so has the cooler weather."

Wheeler, Nordhausen and Bartels all plant eco-fallow corn, where the corn is planted directly in wheat stubble. Wheeler uses this system because every time the soil is worked an average of half an inch of moisture is lost. He said by planting in the trash he conserves moisture and the trash on top keeps moisture in.

According to Bartels, the low subsoil moisture this spring from low snow falls and the lack of early spring rain made the dryland crops low on moisture starting out this season.

This year reminds Bartels of 2002, a year when his dryland crop was dead by August and he didn't harvest a single acre.

The recent rain is keeping Bartels' crop alive and progressing, he said, but he guesses it will need another five to six inches of rain to produce an average crop.

Harold Nordhausen isn't sure the recent rain had all the answers either. Although the rain uncurled the leaves of his corn crop, he thinks the high temperatures and dry conditions may have already done their damage.

Nordhausen said some of the high spots in his fields were already burnt by the heat and he doubts his dryland corn will hit six feet in height, if that. He expects the short corn height caused by the hot weather to negatively impact his yields.

Yields

In recent years dryland corn fields have produced as much as 100 bushels per acre or more. With more rain, Bartels hopes for an average yield of 80 to 90 bushels per acre.

Anderson says the dryland corn in the area is in varied stages and some will probably not recover despite the recent rain, "it's a little too early to tell."

Tom Gaschler, a crop scout for Frenchman Valley Coop, said eco-fallow corn can stand no more than a week to ten days of the extreme heat like what the area has seen recently.

If we could catch a couple more rains Anderson thinks we may have a lot of corn, but "it's just hard to tell right now," he says.