Producers can expect a similar weather pattern during harvest this year compared to last year, as this will be the second year of a La Nina pattern, according to a University of Nebraska-Lincoln state climatologist.

Al Dutcher, state climatologist in the university's Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, expects to see an overall drier pattern during harvest in the Central Plains. He doesn't anticipate much delay this year.

"Timing will be more variable due to cooler conditions this spring across the Panhandle and North Central Nebraska," Dutcher said. "Those regions may not hit crop maturity until late September or early October."

Dutcher said there has been more soil moisture in western Nebraska this year than last year. Based on precipitation patterns in that region, he said more moisture could carry over into the end of the growing season.

As long as there's no daily rain for two weeks straight, though, Dutcher said producers should have ample time to dry out the soils.

He said harvest should take off in the southern half of the state during the last two weeks of September for corn, but that will depend on the amount of rainfall and how quickly the crop dries. He doesn't anticipate a repeat of 2009, which had a late maturing crop and various weather problems, including a long-lived wet period.

"We have a very strong drought across the southern and Central Plains," Dutcher said. "As long as those persist, we will more than likely share in some of those periods of above normal temperatures."

According to Dutcher, precipitation typically drops off from September to October. He said the eastern region of the state could get between 3 and 3.5 inches and the western region between 2 and 2.5 inches in September, but those numbers would drop in the subsequent months.

Based on past experiences and the way this growing season has gone, Dutcher suspects that trend will continue this year.

"The one fly in the ointment that would cause this to be thrown out is if there's a major tropical system coming on Texas and up through the Central Plains," Dutcher said.

That would somewhat break the drought, Dutcher said, but if it brings more moisture in the Central Plains, there could be a lot of rainfall in a short amount of time. That would be a concern, especially with the flooding this summer across the Midwest.

Last year at this time, the Lake McConaughy reservoir was at 89.3 percent of its capacity, with federal mandates saying the reservoir had to stay under 90 percent of its total capacity by Oct. 1. Now the reservoir is at 91.1 percent of its capacity.

Dutcher said there have been some draws from the reservoir for irrigation due to hot and dry weather, but he expects that will only last through mid-September. McConaughy and other upstream reservoirs, including Seminoe, Pathfinder and Glendo, are extremely full. Also, there has been lower irrigation demand this year due to wetness in various regions. These two factors could cause an issue of managing water next spring, said Dutcher, but it also will depend on the snowpack this winter.

"Bottom line, we don't have the storage space available to handle a normal snow year right now," Dutcher said. "We will play this game once again in terms of how much room we have to make more storage and whether or not to do an early release."