

The recent blizzard across the Panhandle and north central Nebraska brought bone-chilling temperatures dipping to the teens and even below zero, but it appears not to have caused widespread damage to the state's wheat crop.

Most of the crop was in the tillering stage and less susceptible to freeze damage than it would be at a later stage. The lack of soil water in many areas, winter wheat health, and poor stands are more pressing concerns for producers at this time.

Winter wheat is still emerging in some areas that were too dry last fall for germination to occur. Noel Mues, extension educator in Furnas County, estimated that only 20-25 percent of the winter wheat germinated and emerged last fall in Furnas County.

Several other counties had similar results. In some areas where winter wheat did not germinate due to dry soil, there was enough snow over the winter to provide for wheat to germinate and establish this spring. Some areas have stands that are less than desired, but in most situations, the producer will be ahead to take the field to harvest. With the less competitive stand, weed management will be an issue.

Wheat condition varies across the state, largely due to whether soil water was available last fall and winter. Many winter wheat fields still lack a good profile of soil water.

A survey of fields on April 12 found that in many fields that were fallowed last year, soil water was only available in the top 20 inches. A field in western Keith County had moisture below 4 feet (the depth of the probe), but it was not typical of the area.

According to the April 15 USDA Nebraska Crops Report Nebraska wheat condition was rated 17 percent very poor, 33 percent poor, 38 percent fair, 12 percent good, and 0 percent excellent. Three percent of the wheat crop had jointed, behind last year's 34 percent and the long-term average of 10 percent.