

April 1, 2002

Dear Observer,

In our letter to you two years ago, we emphasized how abruptly Minnesota's precipitation patterns can change within short time intervals. In last year's letter, we stressed how radically precipitation patterns can change over distance. In this year's letter, we discuss rainfall variation over time AND space. The 2001 growing season offered classic examples of month-to-month and region-to-region variability.

The accompanying maps divide the 2001 growing season into two parts; April through June, and July through September. In many locations, the April through June totals were twice those of July through September. Rainfall for the spring and early summer topped the historical average by more than four inches over much of Minnesota. The April rains, along with spring snowmelt, led to significant flooding in many areas. The wet April and May also delayed the planting of crops by many weeks.

Weather patterns swiftly changed after the third week in June in all but extreme northern Minnesota. Over a relatively short period of time, talk turned from wet and stormy weather to the threat of drought. Mid to late-summer precipitation totals fell short of historical averages by more than four inches in southwestern and central Minnesota. Precipitation deficits in these areas were responsible for reduced crop yields, and led to lower lake, wetland, and stream levels. By contrast, mid to late-summer rainfall totals in the far north were above the norm by two to four inches. Late growing season precipitation varied by six inches across the span of one county (Beltrami), demonstrating how variable Minnesota's precipitation climate can be across rather short distances.

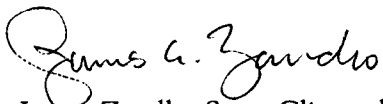
The 2001 listing of monthly precipitation totals for observers in your vicinity should show your observations. If your data are missing, or if inaccurate values are shown for you, let us know and we will correct the values in the data base (contact: mwgcg@soils.umn.edu or 651-296-4214).

The enclosed annual observation form is for your personal records only. Please use the monthly forms to report data to the network administrator. The observing notes handout has been revised. Please take a moment to review it. We appreciate the care that you take to fully and accurately record your observations.

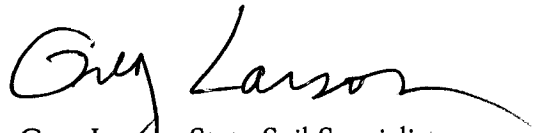
All volunteer precipitation data can be found on our Web site at <http://climate.umn.edu>. Please pass this Web address along to friends, teachers, and anyone who shares your interest in the weather.

Thank you for contributing your data to the statewide precipitation archive. We appreciate your time and your diligence. You provide an important public service, and we are most grateful.

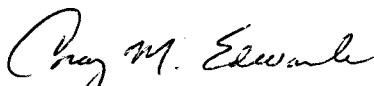
Sincerely,



James Zandlo, State Climatologist
Department of Natural Resources



Greg Larson, State Soil Specialist
Board of Soil and Water Resources



Craig Edwards, Meteorologist-in-Charge
National Weather Service - Chanhassen



Donald Baker, Professor Emeritus of Soil Science
University of Minnesota