

Cold weather and wind set back some local crops

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BY: Jerry Abbott, The Torrington Telegram

The snow, cold and heavy winds experienced last week in Goshen County have had a negative impact on area crops.

According to Bob Baumgartner, farm manager at the James C. Hageman Sustainable Agriculture Research and Extension Center (SAREC), the crop impacted most was sugar beets.

"It depends whether the sugar beets were planted in moisture and whether they were coming out of the ground," Baumgartner said. "If the plants were out of the soil or just right under the soil they got nipped by the frost. Friday evening into Saturday morning the temperature got down to 20 degrees. These plants can't handle extended cold weather."

According to Jerry Darnell, Nebraska and southeast Wyoming ag manager for Western Sugar Cooperative, the cold, 22-degree temperatures on Saturday morning killed many sugar beets in the area.

"Most of the beets had not emerged," Darnell said. "They were in what we call the 'kink' stage just under the ground. The freezing temperature caused the ground to push the beets, killing them. We estimate 22 percent of area beets will need to be replanted, or approximately 10,000 planting acres in the southeast Wyoming and Nebraska area. Approximately 1,000 acres in the Torrington area are affected."

Baumgartner said the wheat crop in the area was also set back.

"The dry land wheat crop got stressed," Baumgartner said. "With the wind the wheat got set back in time. It is too early to talk yield. Moisture will determine that. Irrigated winter wheat got some cosmetic damage but no great yield loss."

Although area alfalfa was also affected, Baumgartner said he expects the crop to recover.

"It (alfalfa) was affected most by the cold temperatures. Cooling down the soil temperature will make it take longer to come up."

Jim Freeburn, director of operations at SAREC, said he is more concerned about area precipitation than the last week's cold weather.

"Precipitation in April was one-quarter of normal," Freeburn said. "This is the single greatest predictor of range grasses for the rest of the calendar year."

Freeburn and Baumgartner said they had not heard a general report on the effect local weather had on cattle.

"Some of the young and weak livestock got stressed," Freeburn said. "With late calving I am sure some were lost."