

Is the Drought Over?

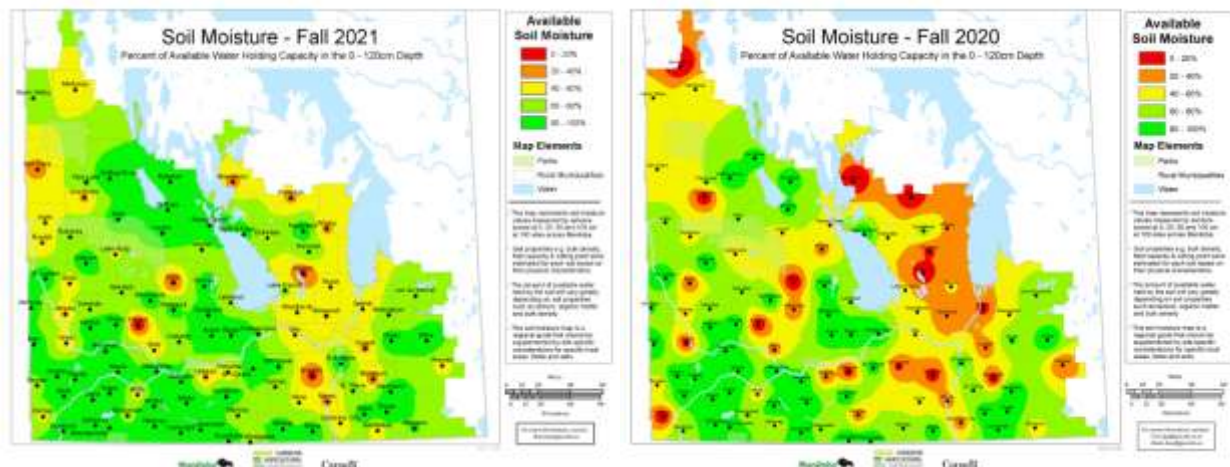
By John McGregor, MFGA Extension Support

“Manitoba has experienced drought in 2003, 2012, 2018, 2019 and now possibly 2020/2021.”

This quote is from an article in the March 2021 edition of the MFGA e-Bulletin on [Annual Forages During a Drought](#). As it turns out, 2021 will be considered another drought year for Manitoba.

So now the question becomes: **Will 2022 be another year with dry conditions?**

When we view the two maps below and compare moisture conditions in the fall of 2021 to the same period in 2020, we see a 20 percent improvement.



If you were to compare this to the average year, most of Manitoba would be in the green or at 80-100 percent of water holding capacity.

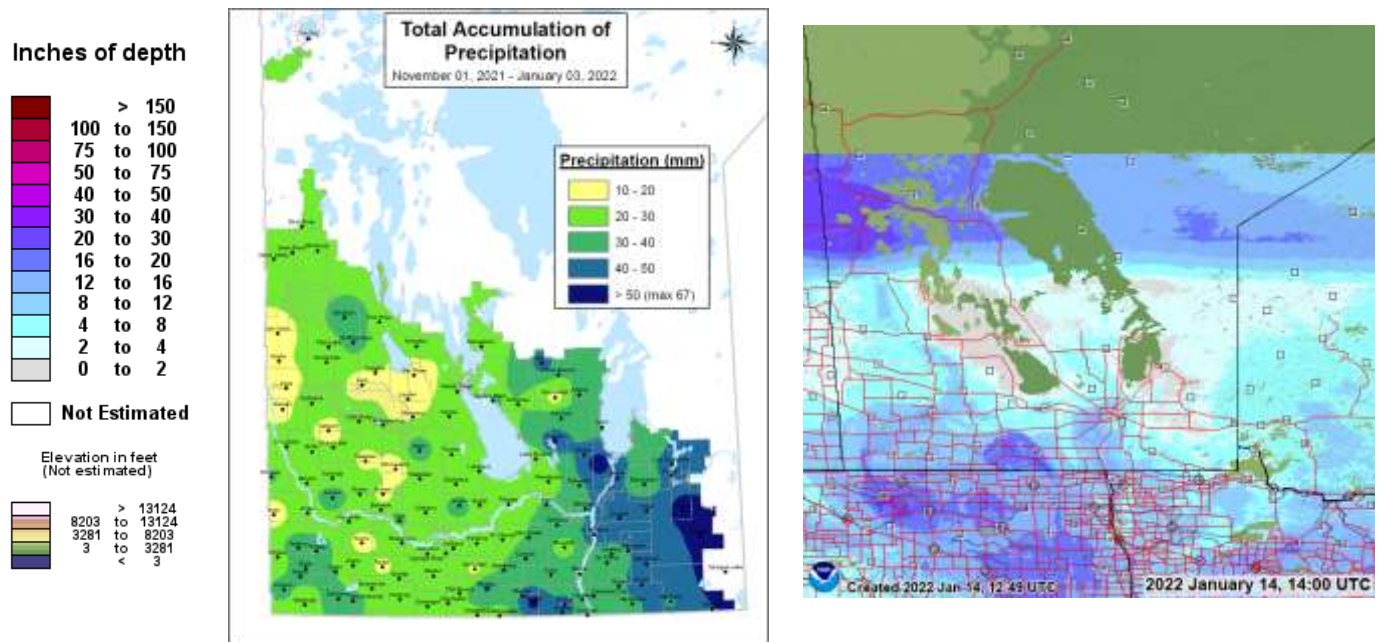
<https://www.gov.mb.ca/agriculture/environment/soil-management/manitoba-fall-soil-moisture-survey.html>

What we do know is that this year's crop will be very dependent on additional moisture during the winter and spring period. The forage crop will be extremely dependent on timely rains during the summer period if we have any hope of replenishing forage inventories.

Presently we are putting a lot of stock in snowfall amounts and although this may no doubt add some additional moisture to the soil, there are a lot of factors that need to come into play to make any difference.

If we go to the [MFGA November Hay Situation & Price Report](#) and click on the [Manitoba Ag Crop Talk presentation \(24:30 minutes\)](#), we get a good understanding of some of the factors needed to improve snow melt entering the soil.

One other factor is the moisture to snow ratio. Generally one foot of snow has 1 inch of moisture. Looking at the map below we can see just how much snow cover we have across Manitoba as of January 14. The second map shows us how much moisture we have received in the last 2 months of 2021. Looking at this as a percentage of normal, it falls in the 40-60 percent range for most of the province with the areas in blue getting close to or above 80 percent of normal.



A slow melt in the spring and the addition of rain or snow during this period will be key to receiving the most benefit from this snow increasing soil moisture levels rather than running off into ditches and rivers.

So to the question: **Is the Drought Over?**

If we look at where we are compared to this time last year, we are definitely in better shape with regards to soil moisture levels going into the fall. We are also in better shape with regards to the potential of additional soil moisture in the spring due to the amount of snow we have received so far. Both of these factors will help get us off to a better start come spring and the question then becomes:

Will timely rains and warm temperatures continue throughout the growing season?