

## Weather Trac

# Monitor weather with online tools

By WILLIE VOGT

**T**HE old saying that everyone talks about the weather but nobody ever does anything about it remains true. Yet these days you can sure get a lot more weather information to talk about thanks to a host of Web sites with a wide range of information, much of it for free. Whether you're looking to see if it will rain on your fresh-cut hay crop, or if there's any rain in the future for a parched field, the Internet is a super resource if you know where to look.

We've pulled together a wide-ranging list of Web sites you can peruse on a rainy day when you've got some office time. Some work better than others for dial-up connections, which many farmers still have. Many sites have great data tables that load fast even for a slow hookup; just keep the use of graphics low. If you get a radar image and you have a slow Internet connection, don't select "loop," and you'll avoid a lot of hassle.

We've grouped this month's information into two areas: useful data and severe weather.

Next month we'll cover more Web tools you can use for your operation.

### Key Points

- Weather information is now readily available on the Internet.
- Severe-weather data tailored to your location allows for a quick look at trouble.
- Using a special Web feed, you can track ag weather for your operation.

There's a lot of weather data out there for users to access; much of it is free. We've pulled together a few sites that we know will be useful to our readers.

■ [www.usda.gov/oc/weather/index.htm](http://www.usda.gov/oc/weather/index.htm). This is the USDA's Joint Agricultural Weather Facility site produced in conjunction with the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration, and it is filled with plenty of ag-weather information.

■ [www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov](http://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov). The National Weather Service Climate Prediction Center site includes long-range outlooks and other information that can help you plan risk-management strategies for your operation. A prediction of worse-than-normal weather is a good guide when deciding which crop-insurance coverage to carry.

■ [www.wr.noaa.gov/index.php](http://www.wr.noaa.gov/index.php). This National Weather Service site gives you a map of key weather warnings for the Western United States.

■ [www.met.utah.edu/mesowest](http://www.met.utah.edu/mesowest). This mesonet site based in Utah tracks weather-station data from around the nation. A mesonet site collects information from several remote weather stations. If you want to know the overnight temperature for towns in your county, check this site out and start by clicking on your state.

### Tracking bad weather

The following sites offer you a choice of services. Depending on your Web connection and computer, one will perform better than the other. The last one is a special service now available from the NOAA.

■ Weather Underground is a popular weather destination for many interested in what's happening outside. The site is filled with useful information, but for a direct hookup to severe weather, visit [www.wunderground.com/severe.asp](http://www.wunderground.com/severe.asp). The opening page features a national map; click on areas where alerts are present for more details. It loads quickly and offers useful information.

■ The Interactive Weather Information Network, or IWIN, has a severe-weather page as well that can be customized for your location. You can click for national weather warnings and drill down for local information as well. Also, live satellite maps review weather headed your way. Check out [iwin.nws.noaa.gov/iwin/nationalwarnings.html](http://iwin.nws.noaa.gov/iwin/nationalwarnings.html).

■ RSS, or really simple syndication, is the latest trend in using the Internet. You can "subscribe" to information linked directly to an RSS reader on your computer. You can subscribe for free to [my.yahoo.com](http://my.yahoo.com) and have RRS feeds appear there. The National Weather Service now offers RSS alerts that you can customize to your area. Just visit [weather.gov/alerts](http://weather.gov/alerts) and find the link for your state's feed. Then add that to your RSS software. (Yahoo offers instructions on how to set it up on its system.)

You'll also find other RSS feeds out there for news and other information you might want to subscribe to as well. Check that out by typing RSS into Google or your favorite search engine.

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