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Winter Wheat Meeting discusses Mesonet

By TONYA S. GRACE, NEW ERA STAFF WRITER 8 hrs ago

Officials are beginning to implement a second tier of Mesonet stations across the state in 2018, although Christian County is not among the communities slated to receive one of the new stations.

Melissa Griffin, a quality assurance specialist with the Kentucky Mesonet at Western Kentucky University, noted that there are no plans for additional stations in the local community.

Christian County already has one Mesonet station, located in the northern part of the county.

It began operation in 2014 and, like its counterparts throughout the state, provides information about temperature, wind, humidity, solar radiation and precipitation from its site in north Christian County.

“It allows us to capture weather in real time,” noted Griffin, who was on hand during Thursday’s Winter Wheat Meeting, which took place at the James E. Bruce Convention Center in Hopkinsville.

The annual meeting focused on a variety of topics for area farmers, including a reassessment of last year’s wheat freeze event, the impact of weather and climate on wheat crops and the application of rye management concepts used in northern Europe to Kentucky, in addition to the Mesonet discussions.

Dr. Stuart A. Foster, director of Western's Climate Center, noted that Mesonet stations have been operating in the state for 10 years now, collecting data about air temperatures, precipitation, soil radiation and wind speed direction, and he said officials are continuing to "build out the network."

Soil moisture and temperature have been added at several sites, for example, along with barometers and field cameras. As of now, there are 70 Mesonet stations across the state, and Griffin notes that representatives in emergency management, agriculture and national weather agencies are using the data to benefit agriculture and public safety and to keep an eye on weather throughout the state.

Foster also talked about climate trends and outlooks in the state, noting that temperatures have been colder in the last couple of decades in Kentucky, although not by much. He said last winter and that of 2012, five years ago, were extremely warm, while the winters of 2014 and 2015 were cold.

"We've been dealing with a tremendous amount of variability in terms of our winter weather conditions," he said. "We've had ups and downs, but we've not had a really cold winter since the 1970s.

"We haven't seen a cold winter in 40 years," he added.

Foster said it's literally been a case of temperatures too cold for snow, but he said that pattern will change soon, with a forecast of warmer temperatures and an opportunity for rain in the forecast.

He noted that, while it will be colder in the north, temperatures in the southern part of the country will be above normal and above normal precipitation is probable in the next three months, he said.

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