

The states of Oklahoma, Kansas and Nebraska had their driest May-to-October period in at least 118 years, increasing stress on winter-wheat crops planted during the last two months, according to T-Storm Weather LLC. Rainfall in the three states, which produced 59 percent of U.S. hard, red winter wheat last year, was 8.6 inches below the average since records began in 1895, Mike Tannura, T-Storm's president, said in the report Tuesday. That's worse than the dry spells in 1952, 1956, 1934 and 1939. The six months ending Nov. 30 also are set to be the driest for that period, and the drought probably will expand, Tannura said. Wheat futures in Chicago have surged 51 percent in the past year as the worst U.S. drought since 1956 damaged crops and eroded soil moisture. The condition of the winter-wheat crop, which goes dormant in the coldest months and then resumes growth in March or April, is the worst since at least 1985, the U.S. Department of Agriculture reported Monday. "A lot of fields are partially emerged, and even if we got rain right now we would be lucky to get half a crop," Jeff Edwards, an agronomist at Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, said in an interview Monday. "A lot of farmers are comparing this drought to the 1950s. It looks rough." As of Nov. 25, 33 percent of the winter wheat was in good or excellent condition, down from 34 percent last week and 52 percent a year earlier, USDA data show. About 26 percent was in poor or very poor condition, compared with 13 percent a year earlier. Plant emergence in the 18 top-producing states was 88 percent, compared with 91 percent a year earlier. About 56 percent of the six High Plains states from Kansas to North Dakota was in extreme or exceptional drought as of Nov. 20, up from 6.3 percent a year earlier, government data show. In addition, weather damage led to smaller harvests in Russia, Ukraine, Australia and Europe, reducing global production by 6.4 percent this year to a five-year year low. Wheat is the fourth-largest U.S. crop, valued at \$14.4 billion in 2011 behind corn, soybeans and hay, government data

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