

# Farmers may see wet, cooler spring

State climatologist gives three-month outlook

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State Climatologist of Iowa, Justin Glisan, Ph.D. says Iowa is seeing an elevated chance of cooler temperatures during March, April and May, and an elevated chance of wetter than average conditions across the entire state during that same time frame.

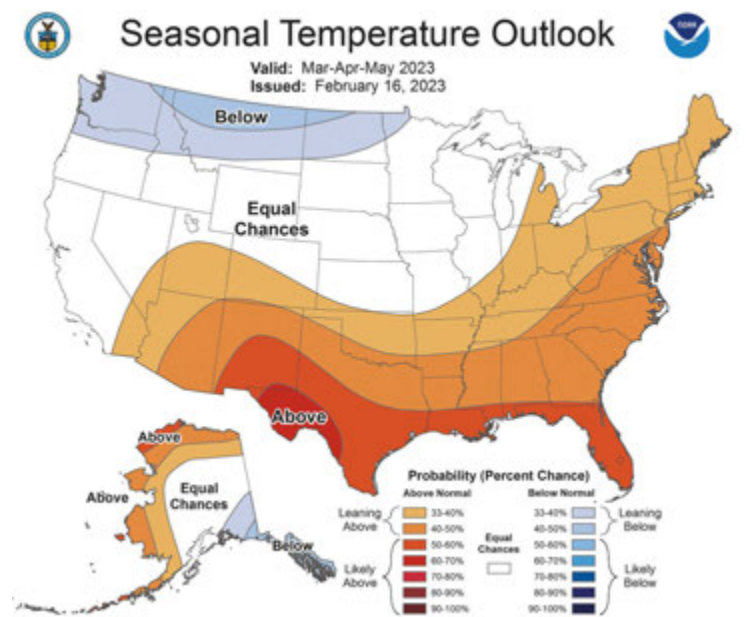
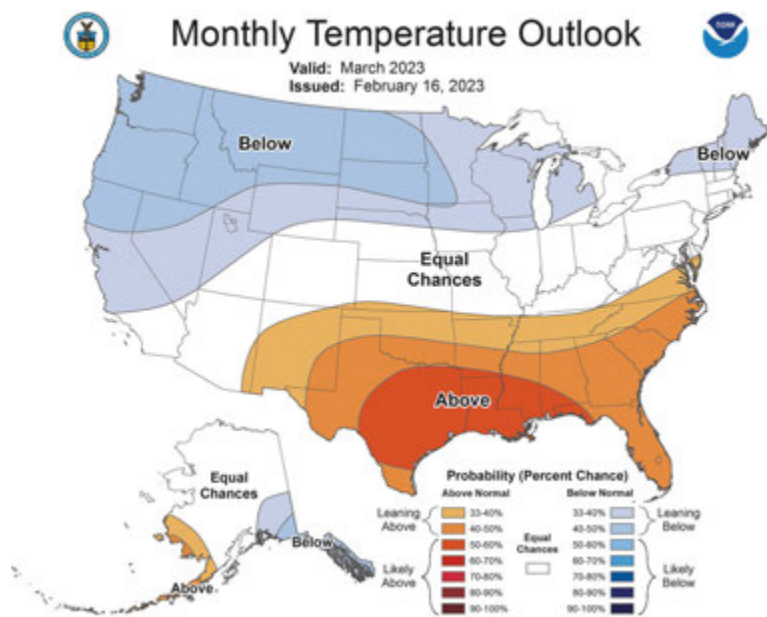
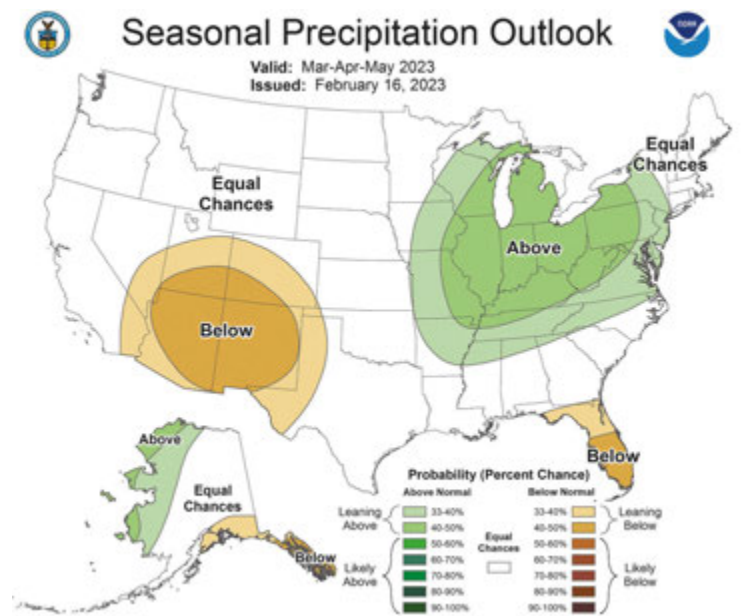
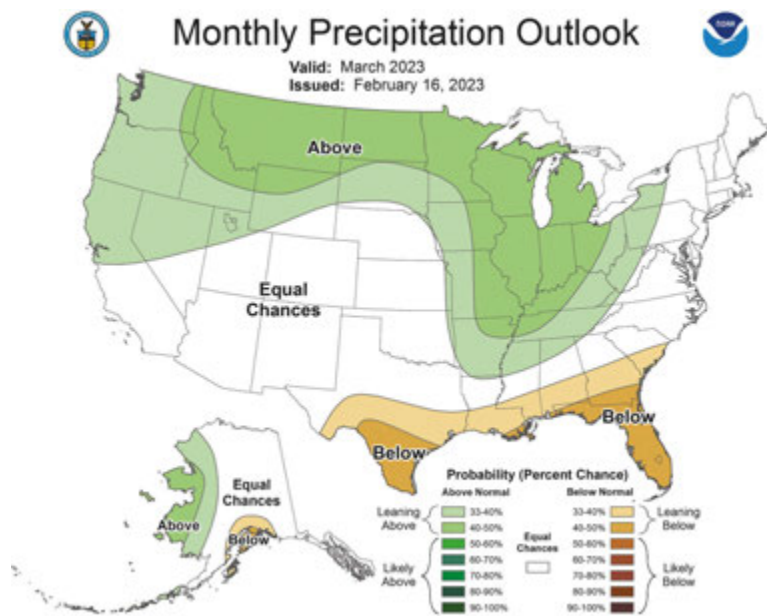
“That’s a good signal to see, given the widespread drought that we have across the state that has persisted for the past three years,” he said, especially for the eastern two-thirds of the state.

“If you look at the last three years, we’ve been stuck in a La Nina phase, a cold phase,” he said. “We’ve seen three years of this... and going back to 1950, we’ve only had two other three-consecutive years of La Nina.”

Glisan said a transitional period is coming, and climate models are showing 85 percent transition to ENSO-neutral, which is when neither La Nina or El Nino is present. “La Nina is a cold phase, and El Nino is a warm phase,” he said. “These are sea surface temperature anomalies in the Pacific Ocean that impact the atmosphere.”

In the ENSO-neutral phase, sea surface temperatures are near normal, he said, expecting the shift to start in March.

Glisan also said this is the 25th driest year on record out of 151 years of record-keeping. He also said this was Iowa’s 29th driest summer and 15th driest fall. “We didn’t see the replenishment or recharge of soil profiles that are important for the next growing season.”



MAPS COURTESY NOAA

The maps on the left show precipitation and temperature outlooks for March, and the other two for March, April and May.

However, there was widespread rainfall before the soil froze at the end of November and beginning of December, so there was moisture infiltration, but the ground is still drier. Frost levels were 6 to 12 inches across northern Iowa, but the middle third of the state is currently in D0 drought conditions, which is abnormally dry.

“What is this important for agriculture? Soil profiles are drier than they should be for this time of year, and

for basically the last year in general,” he said. “This wetter pattern we’re seeing in the outlooks is a beneficial signal given the dryness and the drought we see across the state.”

Although Glisan is seeing a “wetter signal,” he does not anticipate late planting, like last year, when it was cold and wet.

“The big headline here is the shift from La Nina to ENSO-neutral,” he said. “We’re finally getting out of these three

years of La Nina which has impacted the weather pattern across the United States.”

However, he sees a potential of a weather pattern shift to El Nino in late summer or early fall, meaning a higher probability for moisture.

In the meantime, Glisan says the large-scale weather patterns that impact multiple states are shifting to more thunderstorm or smaller scale precipitation events, which will occur in May, June and July. ■

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