

Using La Niña to Forecast the Weather

Tyler Williams
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The definition of weather is the state of the atmosphere at a place and time and climate is the prevailing weather conditions in an area over a long period. No matter how you look at it, climate is what you expect and weather is what you get. We know all too well in Nebraska, expectation and realization can be polar opposites. Weather comes up in almost every conversation because of this high variability, but also because of the impact weather has on our agricultural industry.

We know the best fertilizer management in corn or a perfectly-designed ration at a feedlot can have an impact on production, but nothing can over-match the impact weather can have on your operation. This is nothing new or surprising to any Nebraskan, but it is the reason why we focus so much on weather and climate predictions.

Why Does La Niña Matter?

As you have heard, La Niña is on the way. After almost a year with El Niño, it has finally dissipated and we have quickly transitioned to cooler than normal sea surface temperatures in the equatorial region of the eastern Pacific Ocean. This transition has been predicted for a while and is common to past El Niño/La Niña episodes. These past



Typical wintertime pattern La Niña

events allow us to analyze the impacts a La Niña “typically” has on our region and use that to aid in creating seasonal forecasts.

Everyone wants to know what the next season holds, but long-term forecasts in the central part of the U.S. are sort of like throwing darts blind-folded. However, analyzing the historical La Niña events in combination with current weather models allow us to throw darts with part of one eye open. It may not get us a bullseye, but our odds are a lot better.

The challenge with using this La Niña for our late-summer forecast is the late arrival of the La Niña and the lack of consistent historical impacts during the summer. Previous La Niña episodes tend to be warmer and slightly drier than normal in July, August and September for most of the Midwest and Corn Belt; however, the late transition from El Niño may minimize the impact from the upcoming La Niña.

The strongest signal from

a La Niña comes during the winter time, where the winter months are generally cooler than normal in the northern tier of the U.S. The precipitation pattern is not as consistent, but historical episodes have generally received near- or below-normal precipitation from November to April in Nebraska.

What Actually Is Normal?

The long-term forecasts are typically produced in terms of the probability of conditions being above or below normal. Climate normals are the three-decade averages of temperature and precipitation, with the most recent period being 1981–2010. These are calculated every ten years, so they can fluctuate with climate trends. These are not historical averages that would take into account the weather conditions of the past 100–120+ years.

Long-Term Outlook

The latest forecast from August through October from

the Climate Prediction Center (CPC) gives our region an increased probability of being warmer than normal. This forecast has remained fairly consistent for the last few months.

The precipitation forecast has been consistently neutral and has not been providing much confidence in receiving above or below normal precipitation. This is not uncommon for this time of year, especially with a long-term forecast. Most of our precipitation the next couple months will come in convective systems and this can severely limit the predictability, especially since El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) is not providing a strong signal.

The forecast moving into the winter starts to mimic La Niña conditions. The CPC keeps the increased odds for above normal temperatures through the fall, but the odds start to decrease as we get into the early winter period. They start to introduce increased odds for below normal temperatures for some of the northern states during the mid-winter time frame.

There is high (approximately 70 percent) confidence a La Niña will be in place this winter, thus the increased probabilities of seeing La Niña-like conditions in the winter outlook. This may change with the strength of the La Niña and the subsequent atmospheric response, so it will be important to watch for upcoming ENSO updates.

Inheriting a Farm, Seminar Aug. 17

Owning a farm, whether you inherited or purchased the farm, can be quite challenging to manage. Learn management strategies for this asset by attending an educational seminar, “So, You’ve Inherited a Farm, Now What?” presented by Nebraska Extension on Wednesday, Aug. 17 from 9–11:30 a.m. at the Lancaster Extension Education Center, 444 Cherrycreek Road. Participants will learn information to answer questions such as:

- Am I keeping the farm, or selling it?
- How do I manage a farm?
- If leasing, what are key lease provisions?
- What legal considerations do I have with this decision?
- How do we manage family communications and expectations when other family is involved?

Preregistration is requested before Aug. 15 by calling Karen Wedding at 402-441-7180. Registration fee is \$20 per person or \$30 per couple to be collected at the door.

Extension Educators Allan Vyhnaek, Tim Lemmons and Jim Jansen are presenting these workshops and other farm land management education throughout eastern Nebraska.

Vyhnaek says, “I am contacted monthly from citizens who have had their parents pass away and now they are managing a farm for the first time in their lives. They may have even grown up there, but haven’t been around for 30 or 40 years, and need to understand farming practices and management concepts have changed.”

For more information, contact Vyhnaek at avyhnaek2@unl.edu or 402-563-4901.

Don’t Banish the Booster Until Children Are 57" Tall

Jaci Foged
Extension Educator

I was doing it again; talking out loud to myself in my car about other drivers. “Why isn’t that kid in their car seat?” I mumble. My daughter sitting safe in her own booster seat in the backseat of my truck asks who I am talking to. “That driver in the red car didn’t have their child buckled in their car seat” I tell her. My seven-year-old sits shocked in the back...” That’s not safe!” she exclaims. “I know baby; she should be buckled up” I tell her.

You will want to keep reading if you:

- have young children.
- transport children under age 18 in a vehicle.
- wish to avoid penalties for failing to follow Nebraska law.

In my childhood we often sat in the bed of a pickup truck rolling down the dirt road without a second thought. If you go back even farther to my father’s childhood, he remembers they would stick six children and two adults in a five passenger car (clearly the math does not add up). My dad talks about riding in the back window ledge or sitting on pillows to see up and over the dashboard while sitting in



Mary Spath, Nebraska Extension in Dodge County

the front seat. You would think the need to add height would be a clue the child shouldn’t be sitting up front; don’t even get me started about the back window — my how times have changed. Many cars now sound audible warnings and flash lights reminding you to secure your seatbelt. We now have digital signs over highways reminding us to “buckle up” for safety.

But, what about our children?

According to Safe Kids

Worldwide, car accidents are the second leading cause of death for children ages 4–10 years old. Nebraska does have laws which mandate protection of children in cars. Children birth to age 6 must be secured correctly in a federally-approved child safety seat. Infants should be placed in a rear-facing infant or convertible car seat in the backseat of the vehicle. Toddlers can be turned forward facing (still in the backseat) and should be in a five-point harness until the child reaches the limits for height and weight of the seat. Booster seats are used when children outgrow the five-point harness. Booster seats can be tricky. These seats should be used until a child is 4 feet 9 inches tall or 57 inches. **Fifty-seven inches is the average height of an 11-year-old.**

I know, you are thinking your 11-year-old would never want to sit in a booster seat that long. The bottom line is booster seats help a seatbelt fit properly. The seatbelt should fit snugly across the upper thighs — not across the stomach and the shoulder belt should not cross the neck or face. Parents and caregivers should also ensure children under the age of 12 ride only in the backseat of vehicle.

Licensed child care

providers are required to take transportation training if they transport children on behalf of their employer. Providers must complete the “Safe Kids Buckle Up” program within 90 days of hire and repeat the training every 5 years.

Car seat installation can be tricky. You should refer to the car seat manufacturer’s instructions as well as your vehicle’s owner’s manual for guidance on the proper installation of your child safety seat. Lancaster County has a couple child safety seat inspection stations you can visit to see if your car seat is installed correctly and learn how to properly secure a child into the seat. Visit www.safekidsnebraska.org to see their calendar for car seat check events — appointments

are required.

Nebraska law mandates driver and front seat passengers must wear their seat belts. Nebraska has defined this as a secondary law — this means you cannot be cited for not wearing a seat belt unless you have already been cited for another violation. The penalty for not wearing a seatbelt is \$25. However, children up to the age of 6 are required by law to be in approved child safety seats. Anyone in violation of this can be cited, even if they are not cited for anything else.

Be a good role model for your child, buckle up every time you are in the car and talk with your child about why buckling up is important. Make sure your child is 57 inches tall before you banish the booster.

Upcoming Learning Child Trainings

Nebraska Extension teaches several early childhood development classes for child care providers. Upcoming classes include:

“**Early Learning Guidelines - Science**” Saturday, Aug. 13, 9 a.m.–3 p.m. at the Lancaster County Education Center, 444 Cherrycreek Road. Cost is \$20. Register at <http://www.esu6.org/?DivisionID=20040>

“**Nutrition and Physical Activity Self-Assessment for Childcare**,” Saturday, Aug. 27, 8:30 a.m.–3 p.m. at the Lancaster County Education Center, 444 Cherrycreek Road. No cost, lunch provided, space is limited!

For additional information or to sign up for a class, contact Jaci Foged at jfoged2@unl.edu or 402-441-7180.