



DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) A cool, rainy spring is easing dry conditions in parts of the nation's farm belt that saw the worst of last year's drought. But optimism is being tempered, as that weather pattern has kept anxious farmers in most of Iowa, Nebraska, Illinois, and Wisconsin from planting.

The latest drought monitor released Thursday shows snowmelt and rain replenished ground moisture in parts of eastern Iowa, northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin. Central Iowa counties are improved but still short of moisture.

Rain has helped drought-parched areas of Texas, Oklahoma and Nebraska, but many counties remain woefully dry. There is enough topsoil moisture in much of the farm belt to allow plants to emerge, but no deep moisture to rely on if the rain stops again.