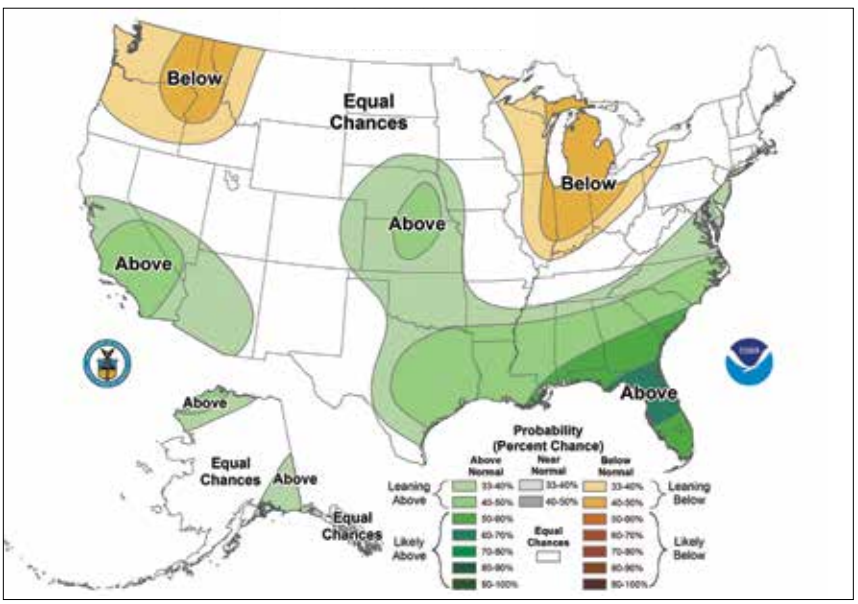
Normal Weather Patterns Ahead

El Niño effects expected to dissipate in April.

*by **Katie Maupin Miller***

Seasonal Precipitation Outlook (Febuary 2024 - April 2024) Issued by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Dec. 21, 2023



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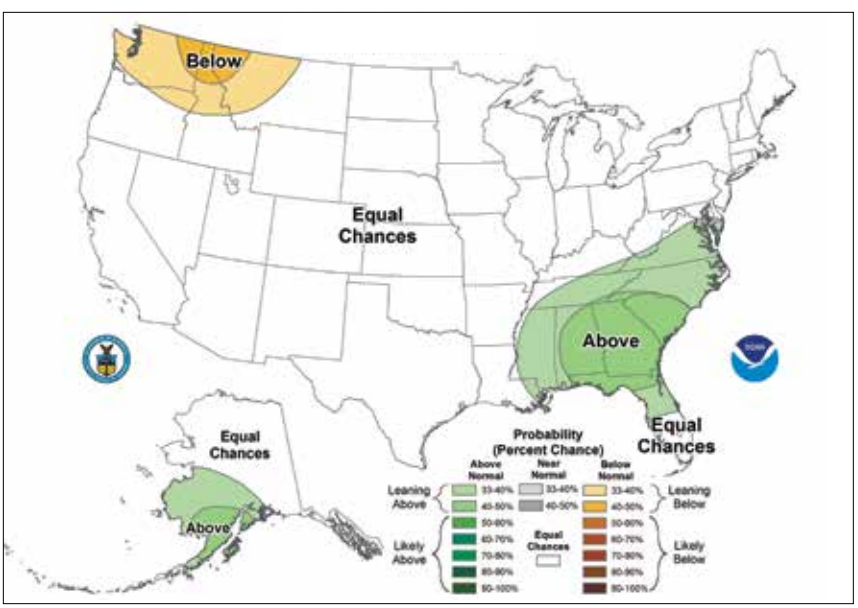


While one-third of the nation's cow herd and hay production areas continued to be affected by drought at the close of last year, there is hope that the shift to a more neutral weather pattern will bring continued reprieve from the remaining regions of drought that affected nearly three-quarters of the U.S. cow herd at its height.

El Niño drives the Pacific Jet Stream south. This translates into wetter than normal winter weather conditions over the southern United States and warmer and drier weather in the north. El Niño is expected to steer the forecast this winter and spring before forecasting models predict a rapid return to neutral conditions from April to July, where the oceanic air won't play such a significant role in the contiguous states' climate.

For cattle producers in the Northern and Central Plains and Southwest U.S., this means El Niño will no longer be affecting the weather during peak forage production months stretching from late spring to early summer. For cattlemen in the Rocky Mountains and Colorado Plateau, all long-range forecasts point to average precipitation in the region over the winter and during most critical months for precipitation to translate into forage production — October through April — according to the National Drought Mitigation Center. This generally neutral forecast for spring leading into

summer brings hope to cattlemen that they will receive enough precipitation to bolster forages as this critical precipitation window closes.

Forecasting the cattle cycle

While the drought and higher input prices were two of the large drivers in the reduced cattle inventory, the Livestock Marketing Information Center (LMIC) believes it is unlikely any significant herd rebuilding efforts will occur this year.

"A larger proportion of the U.S. beef cow inventory is located in the southern U.S., and this region has been experiencing drought conditions for several months," Tyler Cozzens, LMIC agricultural economist, says. "Drought conditions in other regions of the U.S. (e.g., Northern Plains) have been limited, which could provide these producers an opportunity to expand. These expansion efforts will likely be regionalized and may be limited in scope, which is unlikely to generate a significant change in overall inventory levels on Jan. 1, 2025."

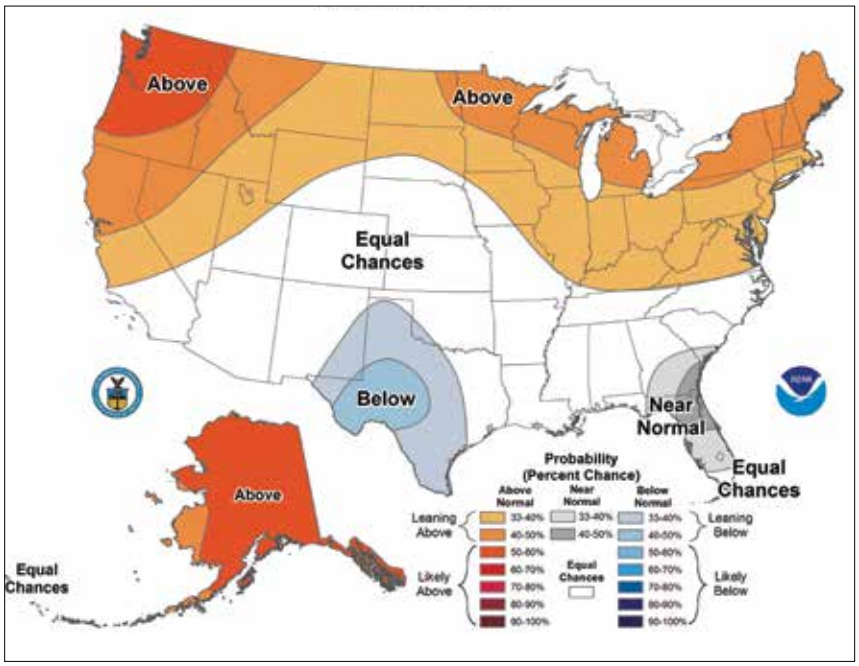
LMIC expects a lower beef cow inventory than last year, with both beef cow and heifer slaughter in 2023 tracking lower than in 2022, yet higher than the five-year average.

"Both beef cow and heifer slaughter will be indicators in 2024 if producers have started rebuilding efforts," explains Cozzens.

Based on the previous cattle cycle, Cozzens reminds producers that prices will likely move lower once supply levels increase.

"During the last cattle cycle, cattle inventory levels reached the lowest point in 2014. The lower supplies led to calf prices reaching about $250 per cwt. These strong prices continued into 2015. As rebuilding efforts started to take place in 2015, supplies increased, causing calf prices to decline," he notes. **BA**

Seasonal Temperature Outlook (Febuary 2024 - April 2024) Issued by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Dec. 21, 2023



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