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# Drought helps stoke global food prices

By JIM SUHR  
Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — The Plains states where the production of corn and soybeans is key are being hit harder by excessive drought conditions in the wake of the hottest month on record in the continental U.S., contributing to a surge in global food prices.

The weekly U.S. Drought Monitor map released Thursday showed that the amount of the contiguous U.S. mired in drought conditions dropped a little more than 1 percentage point, to 78.14 percent as of Tuesday. But the expanse still gripped by extreme or exceptional drought — the two worst classifications — rose to 24.14 percent, up nearly 2 percentage points from the previous week.

Growers in Iowa — the nation's biggest corn and soybean producer — saw their conditions further deteriorate, with

the amount of that state in extreme or exceptional drought more than doubling from 30.74 percent last week to 69.14 percent now. In neighboring Nebraska, the expanse of land considered in the two worst drought categories rose to 91.2 percent, up 8 percentage points.

"Much of the Plains saw the pattern of excessive heat and dryness persist, leading to more expansion across Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma and parts of Texas," Mark Svoboda, a climatologist with the National Drought Mitigation Center, said Thursday.

Those dry conditions have factored into a sharp rise in global food prices after three months of decline, the U.N.'s Rome-based Food and Agriculture Organization said.

The U.S. leads the world in exporting corn, soybeans and wheat, and the surging prices are expected to be felt across

the international marketplace, hurting poor food-importing countries, said a study by British charity Oxfam issued on the eve of the U.N. report.

Corn, wheat, soybean and sugar prices rose. But on a brighter note, the July report said the price of rice and dairy products remained constant. Nonetheless, Oxfam cautioned that "millions of the world's poorest will face devastation" because of the rising prices.

"This is not some gentle monthly wake-up call — it's the same global alarm that's been screaming at us since 2008," Oxfam spokesman Colin Roche said after the latest figures were released. "These new figures prove that the world's food system cannot cope on crumbling foundations. The combination of rising prices and expected low reserves means the world is facing a double danger."

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