

Drought parches America's breadbasket

Farmers in northern Oklahoma and western Kansas are struggling in a long-lasting dry spell that may be a harbinger for severe climate troubles ahead.



BY: **MARC HELLER** | 05/04/2023 01:18 PM EDT



Pat Janssen examines an underdeveloped ear of corn on his farm near Kinsley, Kan. Drought conditions prevented a harvest last year, and Janssen left 400 acres in the field to prevent erosion. | Marc Heller/POLITICO's E&E News

GREENWIRE | KINSLEY, Kan. — Usually by early March, the hard red winter wheat on Pat Janssen's farm is green and high enough to cover his ankles. This year, he had to bend down to see it sprouting, six months after planting.

"This is embarrassing," Janssen said as he pulled a sprout from the pale, dusty ground for a closer look. The skimpy, poorly developed roots tell the story, he said, of a crop that's failed so far in just about every way — no good for grazing cattle, and questionable for harvesting grain later in the year.

"You shouldn't be able to see the ground between the rows. It should look like a really lush lawn just now," said Janssen, who would typically have around 400 cattle grazing on his fields. As March arrived, he didn't have any out.

Janssen's farm in southwest Kansas is one piece of a landscape that's bone dry to the horizon in four directions, the heart of one of the worst droughts to hit this part of the Plains in decades.



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