THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION
College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences
College of Family and Consumer Sciences

La Niña, the Guest that Wouldn't Leave
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Climatologists from the Southeast Climate Consortium, a group of southeastern universities including the University of Georgia, have issued a warning of a La Niña weather pattern potentially developing over the Pacific Ocean, which could impact the Southeast this fall and winter. The La Niña weather pattern, essentially the opposite of the more well-known El Niño pattern, is caused by colder than normal surface water temperatures found along the equator. This often results in a warmer and drier fall, winter, and spring in Florida, Alabama, and much of Georgia. According to a Climate Consortium press release, La Niña has also been to blame for the warmer and drier spring we observed this year that persisted into summer and has left most of Georgia in the throes of a substantial drought. Most often, If the La Niña affect is relatively weak, only the southern part of Georgia is impacted, with northern Georgia typically having near average rainfall or possibly even above-average rainfall. However, if this La Niña weather pattern is especially strong, the effects will be seen north of the fall line as well.

The implication is that this La Niña weather pattern will continue to prolong our drought situation through at least half of the state. September and October are usually the driest time of the year in most of the Southeast aside from the occasional tropical storm system. If La Niña occurs as predicted, this dryness may continue throughout much of winter when rainfall is historically more frequent. According to Dr. David Zierden, Florida state climatologist and member of the Climate Consortium, temperatures may average 2-4 degrees F higher than normal and winter rainfall amounts may be 10 to 30% less than average and starting in November and lasting until March. The La Niña weather pattern and its typical effects found in the Southeast are usually beneficial for wheat and small grain production, but may not bode well for pastures and hayfields in Madison County already worn out from a too hot and too dry 2011.

Managing available hay stockpiles and forages will be critical during this winter if the La Niña predictions hold true. Farmers will also have to take advantage of potentially scarce rains to plan winter annual plantings and fertilizer applications. The University of Georgia's College of Ag and Environmental Sciences and Madison County's Cooperative Extension have timely and valuable information available on drought management for both livestock and forage production. You can visit our office, call us at 706-795-2281 or visit our website at www.caes.uga.edu/extension/madison for more information on how best to deal with the situation we find ourselves in. Here's hoping that La Niña is nice to all of us this winter.