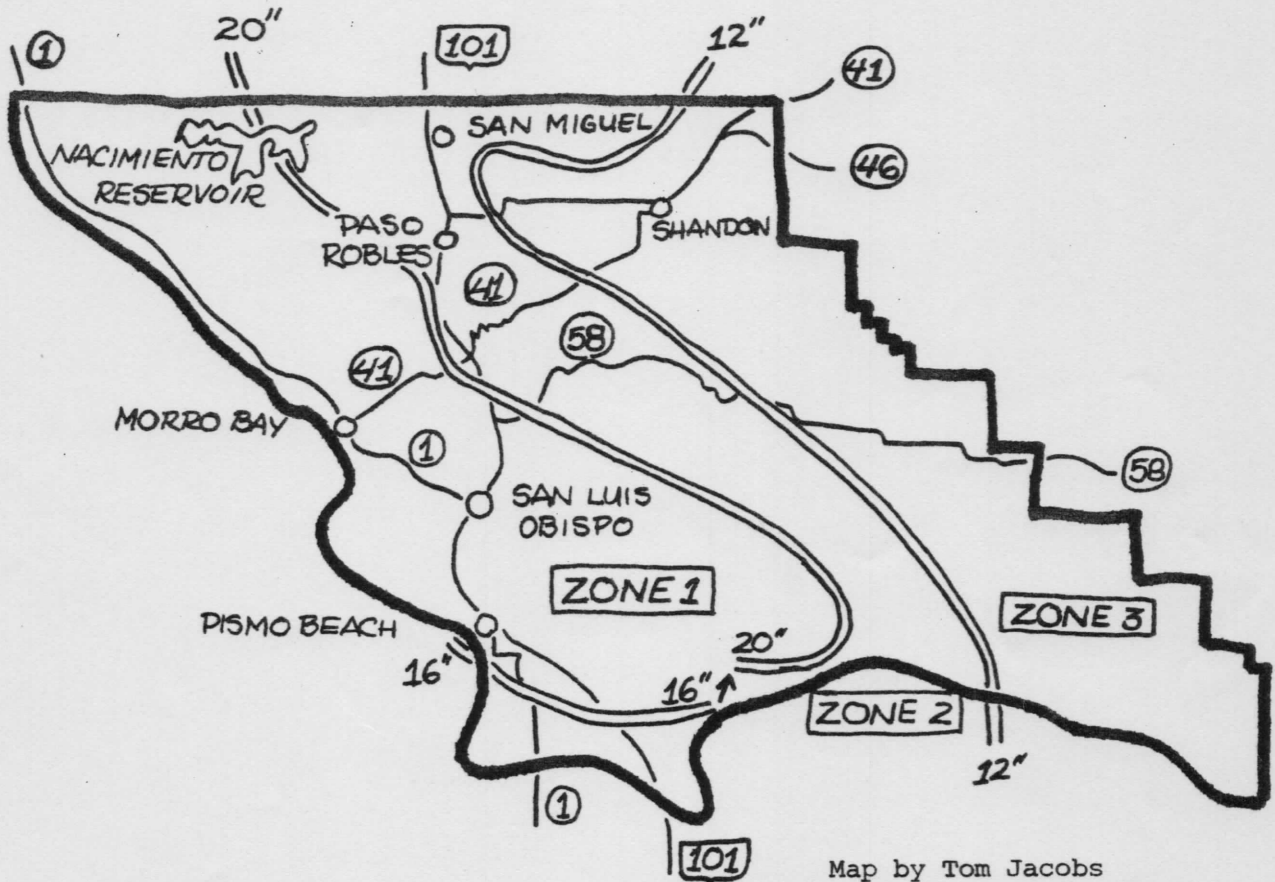


FARM ADVISOR FACTS

13200 FAF #16

THE INFLUENCE OF CLIMATE ON RANGE FORAGE PRODUCTION
IN SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY

by
Bill Weitkamp Jr., Farm Advisor
San Luis Obispo County



Map by Tom Jacobs

The amount and timing of rainfall are the most important climatic variables affecting range forage production in San Luis Obispo County. The season of green grass can begin as early as October or as late as January and can end as early as April or as late as June depending on the rainfall and, to a lesser extent, the temperature. The amount of forage produced on an acre of range land can vary as much as 3,000 pounds in air-dried weight between a dry year and wet year.

In the map above, the county is divided into three zones based on average annual rainfall totals. The line which extends southeast from Nacimiento Reservoir is the eastern boundary of Zone 1 which receives an average of more than 20 inches of annual rainfall. When this line reaches the coastal area near Nipomo, however, it follows the 16-inch rainfall border. Areas in this zone which have adequate soils are highly suited for range cattle production. Stocking rates vary from 6 to about 15 acres of open grass land per animal-unit-year. Brush cover can increase this acreage requirement considerably.

The line on the map which extends southeast from San Miguel divides the more-than-12-inch rainfall zone (Zone 2) on the west from the less-than-12 inch rainfall zone (Zone 3) on the east. Stocking rates on the west side of this line will generally be more than 15 acres per animal-unit-year whereas 30 or many more acres may be required per animal-unit-year on the east side.

In general, cow-calf operations predominate in the high-rainfall areas while the seasonal grazing nature of stocker cattle and sheep operations makes them more suitable in locations of low rainfall. There are many exceptions to this, however.

Range seeding and fertilization practices are recommended only in Zones 1 and 2 where the annual rainfall averages more than 12 inches. Economic returns usually don't justify these practices in Zone 3.



The University of California's Agricultural Extension Programs are available to all, without regard to race, color, or national origin.