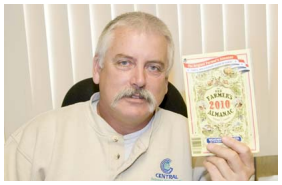


Many ways to predict weather even in folklore.

If you’re a believer of weather predictions in The Old Farmer’s Almanac, you’d better batten down the hatches if you haven’t already.

The magazine’s northern High Plains forecast is for much colder temperatures and above-normal snowfall.

However National Weather Service forecasters say January through March will be warmer than normal with a slightly higher chance for precipitation.

Local biologist Mark Peyton said he takes stock in national weather predictions although he doesn’t discount what the almanac says entirely.

Peyton said he used to bring the almanac to class when he taught at Gothenburg High School.

“In science, you try to look at the predictions made and see if they happen and compare,” he said.

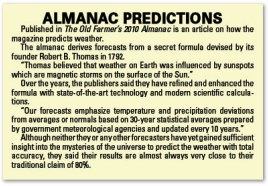
Farmer’s almanac publishers claim solar science, climatology and meteorology as methods it uses to make predictions.

But Peyton said no one really knows the exact method the almanac uses.

“If other scientists can’t look at your methods or data, they can’t duplicate it to see if you made mistakes,” he explained.

In the almanac’s favor is that people rarely remember predictions, Peyton said.

“If it’s not true, no one remembers.”



ALMANAC PREDICTIONS

Published in *The Old Farmer's 2010 Almanac* is an article on how the magazine predicts weather.

The almanac derives forecasts from a secret formula devised by its founder Robert B. Thomas in 1792.

"Thomas believed that weather on Earth was influenced by sunspots which are magnetic storms on the surface of the Sun."

Over the years, the publishers said they have refined and enhanced the formula with state-of-the-art technology and modern scientific calculations.

"Our forecasts emphasize temperature and precipitation deviations from averages or normals based on 30-year statistical averages prepared by government meteorological agencies and updated every 10 years."

Although neither they or any other forecasters have yet gained sufficient insight into the mysteries of the universe to predict the weather with total accuracy, they said their results are almost always very close to their traditional claim of 80%.

Peyton said the magazine’s forecasts are fairly generic.

“ Storms tend to hit about the same time in the fall and spring as warm and cold air masses collide,” he explained.

For example, weather changes often create blizzards in the Great Plains around Thanksgiving as arctic air masses get lower.

This year has been unusual both precipitation and temperature wise.

Peyton said North Platte received more snow in October than in any other single month as long as records have been kept.

“We’ve gotten almost 40 inches of snow so far based on my yard and driveway,” he said with a laugh.

Temperatures in North America have been colder than average while the southern hemisphere has been warmer.

In fact from May to June in the Gothenburg area, Peyton said nighttime lows were above normal while daytime lows dropped below normal.

Although summer seemed cooler to many in the Gothenburg area, he said it really wasn’t even though temperatures were lower during the day.

Peyton cited an old wives’ tale that a wet winter will follow a wet summer which could happen in 2010.

The National Weather Service forecast for January for Gothenburg is warmer with normal precipitation while the three-month prediction is for warmer than normal and slightly higher chances for precipitation.

Peyton pointed to aN early colonist who had some skill, and perhaps luck, in forecasting the weather.

Early printer, inventor and diplomat Ben Franklin accurately predicted a hurricane would hit Philadelphia because of a rapidly falling barometer.

Barometers and home weather stations can be an indicator of changing weather, he said, based on temperature, relative humidity and pressure.

But weather predictions based on changes in nature have been happening long before Franklin.

Some common ones are:

- Ring around the moon, snow or rain will come soon.

Peyton said rings mean a lot of humidity so there is a chance of rain or snow in the future. Frizzy or curlier-than-usual hair are also indicators of precipitation, he said.

- School children’s behavior is related to weather changes.

Peyton said many teachers claim they can predict a change in weather based on the behavior of children. “The kids are more hyper,” he said.

- Ninety days after fog, you have rain or snow.

The biologist pointed to consecutive days of fog on Sept. 4 and 5 and snow three months later on Dec. 8.

Fog on Dec. 12 could mean a March 10-12 storm, he said. Mark your calendars.

A big reason why there’s merit to some of these sayings is because people were so much closer to nature, Peyton said.

“They were more in tune with what was happening around them,” he said. “There were out there every day and looked more for spiritual, not scientific, causes.”

Outside, one can smell humidity and feel it while breathing—a place Peyton finds himself often as a biologist for Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District.

“We’re part of nature and people forget that,” he explained. “We get separated from nature with our cars and homes and buildings and when we do, we lose our intuitive feelings like changes in weather.”

Because of their work, farmers have always been in touch with nature and the weather.

However Peyton described big changes he’s witnessed with the mechanization of farming such as replacement of siphon tubes with center pivot irrigation systems.

Positioning pipe for gravity irrigation took hours on farm ground compared to the push of a button to start center pivot systems, Peyton said.

“Before that, farmers knew the lay of the land better,” he explained.

Those who work outside with animals such as pen riders or people who feed livestock every day notice changes in behavior that signal changes in the weather.

Cattle bunch up with their hind ends to the wind for protection as blizzards blow across the plains, Peyton said.

Being outside every day means some people develop a way of predicting weather changes.

“It’s not always accurate but it isn’t that inaccurate either,” Peyton said.

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