El Niño Briefing

NOAA is predicting this year’s winter El Niño to be one of the strongest on record. El Niño events occur when Pacific waters near the equator are warmer than normal every 2 to 7 years, and this impacts weather patterns in a couple of ways. For South Carolina, temperatures should be normal, but we’re most likely looking at more rain (30 – 50%), from December until March/April (most of it during the winter months), leveling out somewhere around May. While we can’t do much to change the weather, cover crops can help prevent erosion and remove excess moisture from soggy fields. This can help make fields workable sooner than if they were otherwise left bare. Cereal rye (30 lbs/A drilled) has been a good standard cover for South Carolina, and it can produce a healthy amount of growth pretty quick. If you’re interested in giving it a try but haven’t yet, it’s not too late to get them in the ground. On the other hand, if the game plan doesn’t include cover crops, particularly for sites with poor drainage that have traditionally held later planting dates, wetter conditions may cause further delays. In those cases, it’s worth considering reserving late maturing runner varieties for other fields/years.

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