

# Alfalfa



Photo Stock 14990758

In this series of LWSs we are going to talk about weather and climate. Activities in this LWS are built around excerpts from This American Life episodes.

Can you recognize the plant in the picture? How can it be relevant to the topic?

*“By the end of May, things were starting to feel dire.”* – What do you think the speaker is talking about?

1. Listen to the snippet and join the parts of the chunks \_\_\_\_\_ :

freaking

enough to eat

stunted

acorns

were killing

leaves froze

didn't have

out

weren't enough

hayfield

the oak

too early

came out

off livestock

Caption the pictures:





## Why is the rancher frustrated? What else was going on in the area?

Fill the gaps with numbers:

Her hayfield – it's alfalfa – is water-starved. The plants should be \_\_\_\_ inches taller than they are right now. If they don't grow, she's got no feed for her animals. Her neighbor Pat Polson had \_\_\_\_ head of cattle, but only enough hay for \_\_\_\_ .



**six inches are about:**

**five cm**

**fifteen cm**

**fifty cm**

2. Listen to the story once. Who did the journalist call?

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Unjumble the sentences and try to find the correct place for each one in the script.

A. / find a/ he can/ like it/ year just /.

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B. / his mouth/it is,/ a carrot in/ with/

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C. / climate is variable/so what it / is that our /does point out/

---

D. / telling/what / people /I asked him,/ are you/?

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**Nolan Doesken:** Colorado Climate Center.

**Julia Kumari Drapkin:** Hi, is this Nolan?

**Nolan Doesken:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Julia Kumari Drapkin:** Oh, that's OK.

So at the end of May, I called the guy this story's about, the state climatologist, Noland Doesken, to talk to him about all the weirdness. I got him at lunchtime. \_\_\_\_\_ Are you telling them the extreme

weather they're seeing is climate change?

And he said, no. Nolan believes in climate change, but he said there's no way to tell if any particular hot spell or drought happened because of it. And for almost every bizarre weather scenario happening now, \_\_\_\_\_. Take 1910. Warm spring, barely snowed in March.

**Nolan Doesken:** So about the time you think, wow, this is unprecedented. We've never had anything like this – lo and behold, we have had something sort of like it, and it was fully 100 years ago. \_\_\_\_\_. Variability wins.

3. Read the noun phrases and try to find the correct place for each one in the transcript  
Listen and check \_\_\_\_\_

virus outbreak

giant matches

wildfire season

the land

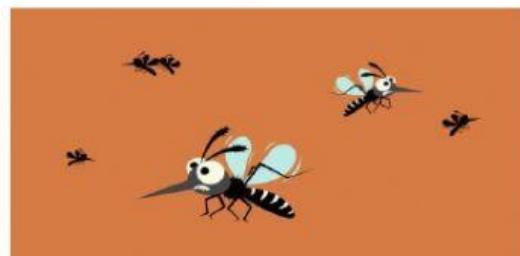
the first storms

climate scientists

a reasonable option

Variability. That's the word \_\_\_\_\_ use when they mean it can get hotter, it can get colder – it's normal. No reason to panic. Nolan said this in May.

By June, panic started to seem like \_\_\_\_\_. Temperature records kept breaking, not just in Colorado, but nationwide. Mosquitoes descended. The worst West Nile \_\_\_\_\_ in the state hit the county where I live.



\_\_\_\_\_ turned brown. Everywhere you stepped felt crunchy, like the whole state was one big tinderbox. Everybody was praying for rain, but \_\_\_\_\_ that came were practically rainless, just flashes of lightning like \_\_\_\_\_ hovering over people's houses. It was terrifying.



And then the fires came and stayed. 2012 was the most destructive \_\_\_\_\_ in Colorado history, burning over 600 houses.

#### 4. Listen to the snippet and answer the questions

- 1) What did people ask Nolan Doeskin again and again?
- 2) What answer did Nolan Doeskin give to the people?
- 3) Where did Nolan leave for a vacation?
- 4) What happened a few miles from his house at that time?
- 5) What happened to some of Nolan's friends?
- 6) What happened to the young girl from the nearby dairy farm?
- 7) What was the possible reason for the accident?



What are these things linked to in the audio?

**broke out**      **Fort Collins**      **for many weeks**  
  
**tons of ash in it**      **pump clogging**  
  
**beyond their control**

## 5. Listen to the snippet and order the lines \_\_\_\_\_

— Whether it was or wasn't didn't matter. Because either way, he realized, if the climate models are right, he was seeing the future.

— His neighbor's death was one of the things that made him start to think differently about the data. The important question wasn't, is this particular drought caused by climate change?

— Seeing where Colorado was headed  
— droughts and dead crops and fires —  
and it was horrible.

— Say, ooh, I don't want to have to live through year after year after year of this. This will be a different place if that is



what our climate will be like.

— You just sort of used to be able to say, ah, that's just a computer model. And then you get to see, and this is what those numeric outputs from that model feel like.

6. Read out the quotes. Is there any dramatic changes in the attitude of the speakers?



***“Some find the challenges ahead overwhelming. I believe that their pessimism is unfounded.”***

President George H. W. Bush, Rio de Janeiro, 1992.

***“I am both determined and optimistic that we can succeed.”***

Vice-President Al Gore, Kyoto, 1997.

***“I believe that we can act boldly, and decisively, in the face of this common threat.”***

President Barack Obama, Copenhagen, 2009.

***“The decisions you make here will reverberate down through the ages.”***

The United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, Paris, 2015.

***“Right now we are still very much speeding in the wrong direction, but, of course, we can still turn this around—it is entirely possible. The leaders like to say we can do this they obviously don’t mean it, but we do—we can do this. I’m absolutely convinced that we can.”***

Greta Thunberg, Milan, 2021.

