



In the Cards

BY BRAD PARKER

249,842,880.



That's the number of different hands you could be dealt if you're sitting to the dealer's left while playing five-card draw with a couple of your friends, or even a couple of your enemies. Invite four more people to join the game and move to the dealer's right, and the number drops to 42,353,640.

If you think that makes for a lot of variables to consider, try gambling your life's savings while matching wits with Mother Nature.

Day in and day out, agricultural producers wait to see with what combination of wind, precipitation, humidity and temperature they'll have to play. And it's not just what happens on their place that causes worry. Weather conditions down the road and on the other side of the globe can affect the cost of their inputs or the markets for their product.

It's enough to make you want to watch the Weather Channel — all day.

While the global forecast is of concern, it's the local weather that causes the most anxiety and has the most direct effect on a

producer's bottom line. Sometimes that effect is devastating.

When Hurricane Floyd hit North Carolina in mid-September, the state's agricultural industry reaped the whirlwind. Nearly 2.5 million acres of crops were laid to waste, totaling more than \$522 million in lost revenue. Livestock losses totaled slightly more than \$12.6 million, including the death of 680 head of cattle worth \$285,600. More than \$260 million in farm structures were destroyed. That equals almost \$800 million worth of damage in that state alone.

Yes, Mother Nature deals a mean game sometimes, and she can't be bluffed. The best you can do is be prepared to hedge your bets.

In a series of articles starting this month, the *Angus Journal* will look at a number of producers who have stared down the elements. We'll explore how they prepared for the events, how they weathered the storms and how they worked to put things back together. Be it wind, water, fire or ice, these folks paid the price for living on the land, but they're ready for the next deal.

We hope you learn a lesson or two from these hardy gamblers or at least gain some inspiration from their faith.

