



Livestock & Pasture Strategy Points for Dealing with Drought and High Energy/Fertilizer Prices

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DROUGHT:

- **DO NOT BE AFRAID TO SELL CATTLE - NOW!** Cull the cow herd deeply to reduce forage requirements and to minimize winter feeding requirements. If you wait, prices become depressed and you will wind up receiving much less for your cattle than you could otherwise. See the associated publication on destocking for more details.
- Consider reducing the current **STOCKING RATE** to 75% of what is possible during average years. During years with excess forage production, use calves as flex grazers to take advantage of the additional forage.
- If pond water shortages have been an issue during drought, consider the development of alternative water sources using well water. This will result in considerable additional expense, but is part of building drought into the overall livestock management plan.
- Consider using corn or other feedstuffs and plant by-products to substitute for hay to stretch hay supplies. Maintain 50% of the diet as roughage under any and all circumstances.
- Be aware that warm-season annual grass hays, such as forage sorghums, sorghum-sudan hybrids, and millets may very likely contain accumulate nitrates that may be toxic to cattle. Always obtain a NITRATE ANALYSIS for these hays to determine they are safe to feed. NOTE: This analysis is different from a typical forage analysis and you must ask for the nitrate analysis specifically.
- Even if you follow all guidelines, **DO NOT** conduct prescribed fires during a drought. Reduced fall/early winter precipitation levels, and thus low soil moisture levels, suggest that prescribed fires should not be conducted during late winter, especially in arid and semi-arid areas. Chances of the prescribed fire becoming a wildfire are also increased during drought, forage will be burned that could serve as an emergency feed supply needed to get cattle through the remainder of the winter, and societal perceptions of burning during a drought are very negative.

- If your property has been subjected to a wildfire, burned areas should be fenced separately to prevent livestock from “camping” on the burned areas. Burned areas will likely be higher in nutritive value early in the spring and livestock will spend more time on these sites. Excessive grazing pressure may prevent the area from re-establishing as it should.
- Remember that close grazing is common during a drought. This close grazing, however, impairs the plant’s ability to recover from drought stress. Pastures that have been subjected to both drought and close grazing should receive adequate protection (and thus, rest) from grazing pressure to facilitate a more rapid recovery.

FERTILITY:

- **SOIL TEST** and apply only those fertilizer nutrients your soil needs.
- Ensure soil pH is adequate to enhance fertilizer uptake efficiency.
- Understand limestone **QUALITY** and purchase the best limestone available.
- **SHOP** for the best fertilizer and limestone value. Understand the concept of purchasing N by the pound and limestone based on ECCE number.
- Remember that proper fertility can aid in forage grass recovery from drought stress by improving both shoot development that is necessary for optimum photosynthesis that leads to improved root development. Lack of proper fertility will impair drought stressed forage grass recovery.
- Use herbicides appropriately to ensure your **GRASS** gets the fertilizer and moisture. Do not, however, use herbicides during a drought as efficacy will be reduced.
- Purchase hay rather than produce it, but get a **FORAGE ANALYSIS** on any purchased hay.
- If producing hay, pick your best ground and fertilize it **WELL** attempting to get all the hay you require from the first cutting. Get a **FORAGE ANALYSIS** on the harvested hay.
- Consider the use of municipal sludge, broiler litter, or other alternative sources of fertilizer nutrients to reduce fertilizer input costs.
- Consider the use of clover or other adapted forage legumes in the pasture this fall to reduce winter feeding costs and provide N for subsequent warm-season perennial grass.