

Cattle Producers At Drought's Door Need A Plan

LITTLE ROCK, ARK.

Arkansas' cattle producers need to be ready with a drought management plan in the face of a forecast that's promising less rain and higher temperatures, said Dr. Tom Troxel, associate department head for Animal Science for the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture.

"Cattle producers have experienced excellent pasture growth the past two summers but drought and extreme dry condition maybe around the corner," he said. "If it fails to rain in the next week to ten day, pastures will become drought stressed."

The precipitation map of Arkansas to June 28 shows most of the state being up to 4 inches below normal precipitation for the month and even if remnants of Tropical Storm Alex wind up drifting north into Arkansas, the situation isn't expected to improve significantly.

"The long-term summer forecast is calling for 80 percent of normal rainfall and temperatures 2 to 4 degrees higher than normal," Troxel said.

If rainfall doesn't arrive in early July, many cattle producers will be short of forage for hay and grazing this summer.

"Producers should be thinking about a drought strategy just in case," he said.

Such a strategy would include:

Checking pastures to prevent overgrazing, which can lead to reduced cattle performance.

Being ready to cull non-productive or low performance cattle if the dry weather continues.

Providing a good water supply as ponds and streams begin to dry. Cattle require greater amounts of water during hot weather.

Weaning calves early can help reduce a cow's nutritional demands. "Remember it's cheaper to feed a cow and calf separately than it is to feed the cow, which feeds the calf," Troxel said.

Ensuring free choice salt and minerals are available. "Nutrient needs for phosphorus and other minerals and vitamins should be met es-

pecially during periods of drought," he said.

Another factor to keep in mind is how drought can affect forage.

"Environmental conditions that retard plant growth often cause excessive accumulation in plants of nitrate and prussic acid," Troxel said. "If forage is suspect, have it tested for these poisons."

The most common accumulators of nitrates, ranked from highest to lowest, are weeds, corn, sorghums, sudangrass, cereal grains, tame forage and legumes. Nitrate accumulates primarily in lower stems. Prussic acid accumulates primarily in the leaves.

Continue to follow recommended guidelines



Making fresh water available during times of drought is important for healthy herds.

University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture file photo by Tom Troxel

for vaccinating cattle, controlling flies and other external and internal parasites.

Troxel also recommends that producers take care not to overextend when it comes to feeding during a drought.

"The price for feed will probably increase as the drought persists," he said. Δ



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