

Cattlemen Welcome Rain, But Some Still Cull In Face Of Hay Shortage

LEWISVILLE, ARK.

One of the driest Octobers on record dimmed hopes of decent fall and winter forage for Arkansas cattlemen, who culled herds in anticipation of potential hay and forage shortage this winter.

"Lots of cattle have been sold due to hay shortages in the area," Joe Vestal, Lafayette County extension staff chair for the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture, said Wednesday. "However, most producers used this dry spell to cull their herds heavily, which will be beneficial long term."

In addition to less grazing, "high feed prices are not helping either," he said.

However, the rain that fell Tuesday and Wednesday was welcomed.

"Many producers have planted winter pastures to help with the hay shortage, so this rain will really help this situation," Vestal said. "The rain fell fairly slowly, so most of it soaked into the soil, but it did help recharge pond levels somewhat."

John Jennings, professor-forage for the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture, said: "this rain was badly needed."

"It will help greatly where winter annual forages such as wheat and ryegrass were planted," Jennings said, adding: "The accompanying onset of colder weather may reduce its benefit for fescue and clover growth through the remainder of fall."

The downside is that wheat seed is in very short supply, and what is available is very expensive, both to winter wheat growers and cattle producers.

Jennings said the planting window for ryegrass would be open over the next couple of weeks in the southern two-thirds of the state, which could provide some grazing in late winter or early spring.

Thanks to La Nina, the National Weather Service is projecting a warmer-than-normal winter, "so if we get adequate rain through the winter, farmers should be able to manage their winter annuals and fescue for grazing in February and March, allowing them to reduce some of the need for hay."

Jennings encouraged growers to take time to make some critical calculations.

"Developing a feeding plan based on available hay supplies and hay quality will be important," he said. "Protecting hay from waste and feeding losses will also help stretch hay supplies further."

The National Weather Service said Sunday that at many reporting stations, October 2010 was among the driest on record. Harrison received just 0.26 inches during the month, making it the driest October ever. At Augusta, the 0.36 of an inch was the least rain received since 1963. For Newport, Jasper and Marshall, it was the third-driest ever. △



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