

# Dry Weather Hurting Pastures; Pressuring Cattle Producers

LITTLE ROCK, ARK.

**D**ry weather is putting the pressure on Arkansas cattlemen to decide between forage and cattle. "Dryness is a real concern; a lot of cattle producers are short hay this year," said Tom Troxel, associate director of animal science for the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture. "It's unusual to go into September and October as dry as we are."

"If producers could get a rain in the next week or 10 days, that would put them in better shape," he said.

The outlook for any precipitation isn't good. The National Weather Service forecast through Oct. 10 does not show even a chance of rain.

"A lot of producers I've talked to don't have any carryover hay from last year because they had to feed it during the colder than normal winter months," said Troxel. With July and August temperatures in the 100s and with very little rain, "many producers are a hay cutting short," he said.

Producers will need to make one of two decisions if they're short of hay: reduce the number of cows to match the hay supply or purchase more hay to match the cow demands.

The market may help producers make that decision.

"The cull cow prices are high right now," he said. "This may be an opportunity to sell older cows and reinvest hay into young productive

stock."

The effect of the long, hot, dry summer is showing in spring-born calves.

"Weaning weights are 40 to 60 pounds off, which means producers will get \$45 to \$65 less per calf," Troxel said. "That's significant."

"When their income is less, they have less latitude to buy hay," he said. "And because the entire state is really dry, they've got to go outside of the state to buy hay and transportation costs will be expensive."

A dry fall means there's less forage to stockpile, which means cattle producers will wind up feeding more hay than in the previous year.

With so much tinder, wildfires can be a fear with burn bans on in more than half of the state's counties: Arkansas, Ashley, Bradley, Chicot, Clay, Clark, Cleburne, Cleveland, Columbia, Conway, Craighead, Cross, Dallas, Desha, Drew, Faulkner, Jefferson, Garland, Grant, Greene, Hot Spring, Hempstead, Howard, Jackson, Lafayette, Lee, Lincoln, Monroe, Perry, Phillips, Pike, Poinsett, Polk, Prairie, Pulaski, Nevada, Ouachita, St. Francis, Saline, Union, White, and Woodruff.

"There's plenty of pastureland along the state's highways," Troxel said. "All it takes is for one spark for pastures to burn, and I've seen where grass fires can get out of control and the hay barn goes too." Δ



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