

# Scene Set For Potential Hay Shortage

LEWISVILLE, ARK.

As Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana and southern Mississippi grapple with deep drought and with more than 95 percent of Arkansas under a drought classification, livestock owners could find themselves scrambling for rapidly dwindling hay supplies, say extension agents for the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture.

Arkansas received widespread rain on Tuesday, but there wasn't anything more promising than a 20 percent chance of showers from Sunday through Thursday. Highs were expected to hover in the upper 90s.

Last year, Arkansas harvested 1.48 million acres of hay. Some of the hay is kept on-farm, but some producers sell what they bale to Texas and other surrounding states.

Lafayette County, Ark., on the Louisiana border is completely drought-covered, with about one-third of the county classified as extreme drought, the second-most severe category on the U.S. Drought Monitor map released Thursday.

"Talking to producers lately has revealed most had about 75 percent of normal yield their first hay cutting, and

**Many Arkansas hay producers are finding they have less to cut since drought began to settle again in the state. These round bales were taken in Saline County, Ark.**

the second cutting is less than half of normal yields if they were even able to cut a second harvest," said Joe Vestal, Lafayette County extension staff chair for the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture. "Some producers were evaluating how to feed their cattle due to pastures and hay fields drying up rapidly."

The signs of an impending shortage are also appearing in Central Arkansas.

"There was very little, if any hay left over from last year," said Brian Haller, White County extension staff chair for the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture. "Everybody fed what reserves they had because of last year's drought and the long, hard winter."

Haller said this year's first hay cuttings were affected by cool temperatures and too much moisture.

"The biggest thing about this year will be producing what the livestock producers need and trying to produce extra for reserves," Haller said. "Unless we have an exceptional hay year, hay will be at a premium."

In cattle-heavy northwest Arkansas, "the shortage is here," said Robert Seay, Benton County extension staff chair for the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture. Growers who do cut hay find that what's left in the field "browns up pretty quickly. The lack of re-growth in hayfields is also a carbon copy of what producers are seeing in pastures."

"If we don't get rain soon and if we get more of this kind of weather, we could be hurting seriously in July," he said.

Vestal said some producers in his county have sold cattle they can't feed. Seay was seeing the same in markets in Oklahoma.

"Cattle prices are high and producers appear to be selling anything that is a problem to take advantage of the prices," said Don Hubbell, director of the Livestock and Forestry Station in Batesville. "Western producers are culling hard



and pocketing cash rather than buying expensive feed."

The fire sale forced by drought may have another effect, Seay said.

"There may be a run on the market as producers rush cattle to sell before the prices drop, so that they won't get caught up in a real negative market," he said.

With Texas forage supplies in critical shape, Seay said there is some anxiety among those who rely on hay not for their own livestock, but for additional income.

"Some of our hay transporters have gotten calls from Texas and other places and have to say 'sorry, we can't really help you'," Seay said. "I've had conversations with people who had booked 'X' number of bales to sell off farm this year and wishing they hadn't made that promissory booking." △



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