

Stock For Drought And Plan For Opportunities

COLLEGE STATION, TEXAS

Though large parts of Central and South Texas received substantial rains, producers should be careful about planning as if the drought were over, said a Texas AgriLife Extension Service expert.

This is especially relevant for livestock producers who must rely on rain-nurtured pastures and rangeland, said Dr. Travis Miller, AgriLife Extension agronomist and a member of the Governor's Drought Preparedness Council.

decade and a half. Do we really need to stock at those levels?"

On a more positive note, where there was substantial rain, farmers and ranchers will be encouraged to plant winter pastures, he said. Most of those who earlier planted into dry soils or after minimal rain will be rewarded.

But Miller still recommended a conservative approach.

"Take another look at it come top-dressing time," he said. "Also, one of the key things to re-



What's remarkable about this Washington County pasture, located about 75 miles northwest of Houston, is that there isn't any pasture whatsoever, not even stubble, said Dr. Travis Miller, Texas AgriLife Extension Service agronomist. "Stock for drought; plan for opportunities," Miller said. Texas AgriLife Extension Service photo by Dr. Travis Miller

"My philosophy is to stock for drought and take opportunities as they present themselves," Miller said. "In other words, keep your stocking numbers low, but if you get a year with a lot of rainfall, bring in some stocker cattle to use that grass but don't push the limit on your stocking rates – ever."

Miller made his comments in light of a recent forecast of not just another year, but perhaps even five to 10 years more drought, by Dr. John Nielsen-Gammon, state climatologist.

But even without the discouraging forecast, stocking for drought is still a good long-term strategy, Miller said.

"We've all just seen people emptying ranches," he said. "Was that the right maneuver to begin with? We've had six major droughts in the last

member is we just came through a year of major drought. If we put fertilizer on the crops and forages last year, chances are we didn't use much if any of it. Soil test and look at what kind of nutrients you have in your soil before you spend a dime on putting fertilizer out."

Miller also recommended those crop producers preparing for spring plantings consider reduced and minimum tillage practices if they haven't done so already.

"You can get your fields in shape, but one of the keys things I've learned while touring parts of the world where drought is even more common than here is to utilize surface residue to trap and hold moisture," he said. "Take a second look at whether you really need to be plowing and turning moisture up to the air." Δ



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