

UT Extension Launches Response To State's Drought Conditions

KNOXVILLE, TENN.

University of Tennessee Extension has launched a new effort to assist the state's farmers and ranchers as they respond to the historic and unseasonably hot and dry weather – weather that is causing crops to wither and turning pastures to dust plots. The impacts are already far-reaching, with estimated drastic reductions in harvests, especially in feed available for livestock this fall.

Through a public website, farmers have direct access online to information that can help them make the critical and sometimes heart-wrenching decisions necessary to keep their operations and families financially viable. Information specific to Tennessee production systems has been collected and cross-linked on the website: <https://utextension.tennessee.edu/drought/> which will be available to the public free of charge on a 24-hour basis.

Dr. Justin Rhinehart, UT Extension beef cattle specialist, is coordinating the effort, which includes livestock specialists, plant and pest specialists, veterinarians, family science experts, environmental engineers, horticulturists, and forestry and wildlife experts from across the state.

Rhinehart says the webpage is a collection of resources that were already available to the state's producers. "The information is collected in one handy, comprehensive website," he said. "The majority of the listed publications have been developed by UT Institute of Agriculture faculty and staff specifically to help Tennessee farmers and families cope with the immediate negative consequences of drought and high temperature." Additional links are provided to resources available from the Tennessee Department of Agriculture, including a hay directory for producers struggling to provide feed for livestock.

"The record temperatures coupled with the lack of rainfall is really having an impact on farmers, who are seeing their crops wilt and their pastures and water sources dry up," state

Agriculture Commissioner Julius Johnson said. "We want to join with UT Extension and our other partners in being a resource and providing assistance wherever we can to ensure farmers get through this difficult time."

The information collected on the pages is also relevant for everyday citizens and homeowners. "Some of the linked information includes tips on reducing power usage during extreme heat and lawn and garden management during drought," Rhinehart said. "There are even links relevant to working with kids and heat stress in the elderly."

UT Extension is also coordinating a series of livestock producer meetings to assist with the increasing dire situation of the state's forage and pastures. Two meetings will be held in each grand division of the state:

- Middle Tennessee
 - * July 17, 5:30-9:00 p.m., Tennessee Farm Bureau Bldg., Columbia
 - * July 19, 5:30-9:00 p.m., Wilson County Fairgrounds, Lebanon
- West Tennessee
 - * July 27, 5:30-9:00 p.m., UT Extension Western Region Office, Jackson
 - * July 28, 9:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m., Brehm Hall, UT Martin
- East Tennessee
 - * August 2, 5:30-9:00 p.m., East Tennessee AgResearch and Education Center, Greeneville
 - * August 3, 9:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m., UT Extension Eastern Region Office, Knoxville

The drought response website will be an ongoing project and materials and links will be continually updated and added, said Rhinehart. He also reminds folks that they have direct, personal access to experts with the University of Tennessee in every county. "Your UT County Extension Agent is available to work with you on your unique situation," he said. "Contact your county agent through the government pages in your phone book or look up the number online through the drought webpage. Click the left-hand link to "County Offices." Δ