

Livestock Management in Continuing Drought

A producers' stocking plan should remain flexible and the key to survival remains in forage supplies. Remember the old saying "A producer cannot feed himself out of a drought". Below are a few tips to consider.

(1) Is it time to sell the remaining cow herd? Analyze your forage supply. Without grass it will be extremely tough to keep the cows.

(2) Analyze your pastures, if they are in bad shape with few native, perennial grasses left to graze, reduce stocking rates drastically. It can take years for native ranges to recover.

(3) Wean calves early! It will reduce demand on forages and improve cow body condition scores for cows going into winter.

(4) Pregnancy check cows this fall! Open cows are two expensive to carry through the winter with the projected feed costs being at an all time high and also having limited forage supplies.

(5) Cull any old or unfunctional cows you have left.

(6) Consider selling cows and utilizing stockers as part of program, (realizing there can be market risks). Stockers will allow for flexible stocking based on forage and quicker returns on money.

(7) Test hay for nutrient content. Know what the crude protein and energy levels are in your hay so you will know how much additional supplements (cubes) should be fed, if any at all.

(8) Base feed buying on cost of protein and energy the supplement provides per ton, not just cost per ton of feed. Remember 1 pound of a 38% cube gives approximately the same protein as 2 pounds of a 20% cube. However, you will get twice as much energy from 2 pounds of 20% cubes, and energy is needed when forage supplies are limited. I know lick tubs are convenient, but they usually cost 1.5-2 times as much per pound of protein as cubes.

(9) Sort the cow herd for feeding cost efficiency.

- *Dry cows vs lactating cows
- *1st calf heifers
- *2nd calf heifers
- *Mature Cows

All of the above have different nutritional regimens and should be fed accordingly, especially with the high cost of feed and limited forage supply. Wasted feed is just added expense.

(10) If water supply is adequate, feed cubes 1-2 times per week at higher quantities instead of feeding 3 times per week. Research has proven that there is no difference in body condition or calving rate between the two. This will save gas money.

(11) If you have a little forage left, consider condensing all cattle down to one smaller pasture or paddock area. Why continue to ruin what little grass is left by selective grazing and the trampling effect, when you are actually haying everyday to meet their forage demand. (Just ruin one area and save labor and fuel expense).

Livestock Management in Continuing Drought Continued

(12) If you keep the cow, feed her good! Cows coming out of winter in a body condition score 5 or better will breed back at a 75% or greater rate. A cow at body condition score 4 or less has a 45% conception rate. Feed is high, but an open cow is the same as a dead calf valued at \$600-\$700 at weaning. (Example) If you had a

100 cow herd and your conception decreased 30% because of poor nutrition, you would lose \$18,000-\$21,000. Can we afford to feed the cows a little more?

(13) Provide a good quality mineral package. Vitamins and minerals are essential to prevent deficiencies which

lead to health and reproductive problems.

(14) Weed control could be important next spring. Spraying for weeds will allow for grasses to utilize available moisture without competition from undesirable weeds.

Drought Can Cause Prussic Acid Poisoning

Prussic acid poisoning is one of the most toxic and rapidly acting of any common poison. Livestock can show symptoms of intoxication within 5 minutes of eating plants with the poison, and may die within 15 minutes. Salivation and labored breathing occur first, followed by muscular bloating, convulsions and death from respiratory failure.

Prussic acid can accumulate in plants such as Johnsongrass, forage sorghums and grain sorghum. Severe drought stress can cause prussic acid to form. High concentrations may be associated with rapid growth, shortly after a rain on previously drought stressed fields. Be extremely cautious on grazing Haygrazer fields or CRP with lots of Johnsongrass.

On the positive side, prussic acid dissipates from plants when cut and properly cured for hay.

Brandon Cave

County Extension Agent-AG/NR

Texas AgriLife Extension Service-Kent County