Planning for and Dealing with Drought

- Drought can be expected as part of normal production cycles
- Overall management plan should include drought preparation and coping plans
- Drought creates management challenges for both cow-calf and stocker operations
- Widespread drought can impact markets
- Focus on operational long-run sustainability and survival

Mississippi Beef Production Drought Website

- msucares.com/livestock/beef/drought.html

Inventory Ranch Resources

- Evaluate pasture and hay quality and supply
- Determine cattle nutrient needs
- Estimate supplemental feed requirements

Efficient Herd Nutritional Programs

- Divide cattle into feeding groups based on nutrient needs
- Allocate forage/ feed supplies to each group to closely match animal requirements

Bull Nutrition Basics

- Younger bulls need less quantity but higher quality diets
- Bulls should begin breeding season in a body condition score 6
- Breeding season activity can reduce body condition
- Target 75% of expected mature weight for two-year old bulls

Cows and heifers in thin body condition at calving time:

- Rebreed slower
- Produce less colostrum
- May not have sufficient nutrient reserves for maximum milk production
- Are less likely to wean a live calf

Mississippi Hay Directory

- msucares.com/livestock/beef/mshay.html

Alternative Feeds for Beef Cattle

- Consider commodity feed price trends and availability
- Compare nutritional values of feedstuffs and economic replacement values
- Understand feed storage and handling challenges
- Consult with a nutritionist on diet formulations and feeding limitations
- Use ionophores and growth promoting implants as appropriate

Forage-Related Options

- Consider stockpiling bermudagrass and tall fescue to delay hay feeding
- Use annual ryegrass in combination with small grains
- Do not overlook alternative forage crops such as brassicas
- Forage test to accurately match hay supplies to supplementation programs
- Use rotational, limit, and strip grazing practice to stretch forage
- Minimize hay storage and feeding losses
Obtaining Approval for Haying and Grazing CRP Land
- County FSA office must submit a request for CRP haying and grazing to the state FSA office.
- State FSA office can approve the request if the producer is in a county in the D3 level of drought.
- If the producer is not in a D3 drought level location, then the county FSA committee must prove a 40% or greater reduction in rainfall over a 4-month period and the request be approved through the national FSA office.

Nitrate Poisoning Concerns
- Nitrogen fertilization during drought increases risk.
- Nitrate tests are available for forage samples (Test before feeding!)
- Sorghum-sudangrass, pearl millet, corn, and bermudagrass are susceptible.
- Haying or ensiling does not eliminate nitrate problems.
- Watch for signs of nitrate poisoning in cattle and treat immediately.

Poisonous Plant Essentials
- Scout pastures and hayfields for poisonous plants.
- Cattle are more likely to consume poisonous plants when forage is limited.
- Quickly recognize and treat signs of poisoning in livestock.

Common Poisonous Plants
- Perilla mint (purple mint)
- Nightshades
- Bracken fern
- Lantana
- Mountain laurel
- Pokeweed
- Pigweed
- Buckeye (horse chestnut)
- Wild cherry (black cherry)
- Oak buds and acorns

Pasture Weed Identification Pictures
- [www2.msstate.edu/%7Ejbyrd/pastureweed.html](http://www2.msstate.edu/%7Ejbyrd/pastureweed.html)

Advantages of Early Weaning
- Allows for more efficient feed utilization during drought.
- More cows can be carried on a limited feed supply.
- Excellent feed conversion of early weaned calves can result in cheaper gains.
- Reduces herd energy requirements.
- Helps cows to cycle earlier and improves rebreeding rates.

Disadvantages of Early Weaning
- Calf management and nutrition must be excellent.
- Labor, facilities, and feed must be available for feeding small calves.
- Seedstock cattle must wean within defined age windows for breeds to accept data.

Early Weaning Calf Feeding
- Start calves with a high-energy, high-protein diet designed for early weaning.
- Hand feed starter diet for 10 to 14 days until to 4 to 5 lbs. per head per day.
- Gradually increase to self-feeder as total intake increases.
- Manage scours and coccidiosis if a problem.
- Use a single diet for best performance through normal weaning age.
Creep Feeding Considerations
- Will improve calf weaning weights
- Will not greatly reduce pressure on pastures or lactating dams
- Good option when calf nutritional needs are not being met (poor forage quality)
- Early weaning may be a better alternative when forage supply is limiting

Cattle Culling Highlights
- Pregnancy check early to find open cattle
- Establish a preferred culling order
- Decide on how deep to cull
- Cull in a timely manner to conserve forage and feed supplies
- Consider custom grazing and retained ownership options

Hot Weather Management Tips
- Keep water sources clean and readily available
- Provide adequate shade at all times
- Work cattle early in the morning
- Plan nutrition programs knowing that feed intake levels may be reduced

Herd Health Recommendations
- Hot dry weather can increase the incidence and severity of common diseases
- Parasite control programs must address both internal and external parasites
- “Calf Comfort” is a critical component for successful weaning
- BQA guidelines are even more important for cattle stressed by drought
- Nutritional stress will have a negative effect on immune function
- Work with a veterinarian to make needed program adjustments

Additional Useful Websites
Weather Information Sources
MSUcares Weather Resources
http://msucares.com/weather/

Hay and Feed Source Information
Mississippi Market Bulletin
http://www.msmarketbulletin.org/

Alabama Hay Directory
http://www.agi.alabama.gov/market_news

Arkansas Hay Producers Database
http://hayproducers.uaex.edu/

Commodity Feed Sources for Arkansas Producers
http://www.aragriculture.org/livestock/beef/nutrition/commodity_feed_sources.htm

Kentucky Department of Agriculture Hay Sales Directory
http://www.kyagr.com/buyky/corral/haysales.htm

Missouri By-Product Feed Price Listings
http://agebb.missouri.edu/dairy/byprod/bplist.asp

Missouri Hay Market Listings
http://agebb.missouri.edu/haylst/

National Internet Hay Exchange
http://hayexchange.com/
Oklahoma Hay Directories
In State: http://www.oda.state.ok.us/forms/mktdev/haydir.pdf
Out of State: http://www.oda.state.ok.us/forms/mktdev/haydirroos.pdf

Tennessee Hay Directory
http://www.tnfb.com/hay.htm

Texas Department of Agriculture Hay and Grazing Hotline
http://www.agr.state.tx.us/producer_info/hay_grazing/com_hayhotline.htm

USDA Memphis Weekly Feed Report

USDA Southeast Weekly Hay Report
http://www.ams.usda.gov/mnreports/MG_GR310.txt

Helpful Drought-Related Links
Alabama Drought Emergency Relief Effort Website
http://www.aces.edu/drought/

Dealing with Drought: A Resource for Cattle Producers (Angus Journal)
http://www.angusjournal.com/drought/

NOAA Drought Information Center
http://www.drought.noaa.gov/

U. S. Drought Monitor
http://www.drought.unl.edu/dm/