

Plan your livestock drought management strategy now

I've been putting off writing about this particular subject in the hopes that we would get some needed moisture but the moisture keeps missing us and so it's time I talk about drought management for livestock producers. With all of Rawlins County being classified as in a D3 Extreme Drought, it is highly likely that livestock producers in Rawlins County will have to make some difficult decisions very soon. As with anything, it's good to have a plan you can follow when it's time to make these decisions. Having a plan can help reduce the pressure of running out of time or help reduce the emotional aspect of making these decisions.

To form a livestock drought management plan, you need to have an accurate animal inventory, know your existing forage resources and examine alternative feeding and management programs. First, an accurate animal inventory is not just an accurate count of the number of animals you have. To have an accurate animal inventory, you must know the sizes and stages your animals are or are going to be in so you can accurately determine their nutritional requirements. This is also important for when you have to develop a culling strategy. A culling strategy doesn't have to be completely a bad thing; it can be an opportunity to implement some things you know you should be doing anyways. Maybe it can be the time to shorten up your calving season or get rid of the older cows whose production has started slipping or improve the uniformity of your herd or eliminate some temperament issues. Second, know not just the quantity but the quality of existing forage resources. Take the time to get your feed resources tested at a lab and then use those numbers when developing your rations. If you have questions or need assistance with sampling or ration development, please contact me at the Extension Office we have a hay probe and software to help with these things. Third, sometimes thinking outside of the box about alternative feeding programs might make the most sense financially for some people. Alternative feeding and management programs can range from dry lot feeding to early weaning to cover crop grazing to contracted grazing and all combinations in between. These options must be looked at and penciled out to see if they really do make the best financial sense for your particular operation.

For any plan to be effective, it must be implemented not just written down. One great way to make sure that you implement a plan is to develop triggers that set each part of your plan in place. I would recommend setting triggers like you would with the pre-harvest marketing that I wrote about earlier this spring. A potential trigger would be if we don't get a certain amount of precipitation by a certain date then you initial the first phase of your drought management plan and then set another trigger and another so that you can put your plans into action.

I sincerely hope that we start getting some moisture here soon and that you don't have to use any drought management plans this year but I do hope that you will sit down and take the time to develop a plan and be ready to implement it should the drought persist.