DEALING WITH DROUGHT
Key Facts for Beef Producers

Drought Management: A Long-Term Grazing Plan

Strategies for dealing with drought should be a permanent part of every grazing plan. You can’t plan for a drought once you are in the middle of it.

- Foster plants with healthy, deep root systems that can reach subsurface moisture.
- Leave litter (plant residue) to shade and insulate the soil surface, reduce temperatures and minimize moisture loss.
- Plan to graze pastures with higher grazing-tolerant plant species first. (e.g. crested wheatgrass)
- Extend rest periods for pastures by using cross-fencing and rotational grazing.
- Keep a rested pasture with adequate carryover in your grazing rotation to provide a forage reserve.
- Balance stocking rate with forage supply. (e.g. weaning early, identifying and selling culls early)
- Stockpile sufficient feed supplies during years of surplus.

Learn more at www.beefresearch.ca/droughtmanagement
Alternate Feeding Options

- Cereals can be grazed approx 4-6 weeks after seeding, and heavily stocked to use all available growth.
- Cattle may also graze failed hay and annual crops. If possible, graze grass hayland rather than legume forage stands. Legumes will provide much better regrowth potential than grasses if rains do return.
- Creep feeding may be an option to supply adequate nutrition to calves while reducing demand on cows and pastures.

Managing Stocking Rates

- Sending animals to rented pastures in other locations not affected by drought.
- Remove calves and/or cows from pasture and feeding conserved forages, crop residues and/or grain in confinement (drylotting).
- Marketing yearlings earlier than originally planned.
- Weaning calves earlier. Dry cows can be maintained on lower quality pastures or with supplemental feed sources.
- Culling the cow herd earlier and heavier; including less productive cows, late calvers, poor temperament, and older cattle.
- Limiting retention of replacement heifers. This should be a last-resort consideration, as this can have the greatest impact on future productivity.

Control Water Sources

- Graze any pastures that could possibly run out of water first. It may become necessary to use a portable stock water supply, in some cases.
- Fence-off water sources and pump to a remote site, such as troughs, to improve water quality and reduce water losses that occur when livestock have access to non-fenced sources.
- Test water to ensure that it is safe for cattle consumption.

Winter Feeding Following a Drought

- If winter feeding includes bale grazing, assess the pasture and distribute bales where you would like to add nutrients through manure and urine.
- Consider the best methods to reduce feed waste.
- Feed the lower quality roughages to cows in the middle-third stage of pregnancy. Save the better-quality feeds for periods before and after calving and for growing cattle, such as replacement heifers.

Learn more at
WWW.BEEFRESEARCH.CA/DROUGHTMANAGEMENT
References


