

TESTING THE WATERS

WATER SAMPLING BENEFICIAL PRACTICES FOR BEEF CATTLE PRODUCERS



Clean, safe water is essential for animal health, productivity, and performance. Regular water testing helps catch potential problems early—before they affect your herd. Testing can identify issues with mineral content (e.g. sodium, sulphates, iron), heavy metals, nitrates, bacteria, pH, dissolved solids, salinity and hardness, and other harmful contaminants.

WHEN TO TEST WATER



Water should be tested at least once a year as part of regular beneficial management practices. It is recommended to test all water sources that cattle have access to. Additional testing may also be required: After extreme weather (drought, flooding, etc.); when changes are noticed in animals (signs of dehydration, health issues, etc.); when water quality issues are suspected; or when moving cattle to a new or seasonal water source.

HOW TO TEST WATER



1 Find a laboratory

- Use a local or regional lab that offers water testing. Consult the **Water Lab List** to find one in your area.



2 Collect a sample

- **Use a clean, sealable container.** Generally, a 1L sample is collected, but some labs provide specific containers and collection instructions. **Be sure to clearly label the sample.** Date, location, and source type at minimum.
- Obtain samples from the location where cattle actually drink, not from a tap or storage tank (unless this is the location they drink from).
 - **For dugouts or ponds,** this is generally 1-2 feet below the surface and 2-3 feet from the edge.
 - **For wells or troughs,** ensure a fresh sample by running water for 1-2 minutes before sampling.
 - The laboratory can help clarify sampling location based on the desired tests and water system type.
- Avoid contamination with dirt and debris when sampling.



3 Submit to the laboratory

- Many labs have specific storage instructions for samples like keeping the water at a specific temperature (e.g., 1-4°C, which might require a cooler and ice packs) or submitting within a certain time frame (e.g., within 24 hrs - especially for bacterial testing).



4 Interpret the results

- Work with advisors and use the **Water Results Interpretation Guide** to understand your results and take action.

