

RECENT WEATHER CONDITIONS COULD CAUSE PROBLEMS FOR BEEF CATTLE

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The recent hot, dry weather experienced by many areas of the state could create problems for cattle operation. With elevated temperatures and decreased forage availability, cattle performance has been reduced. Future performance could also be affected.

There have been an increase in number of cattle marketed compared to last year at some sale locations. With the increase in number being marketed and the declining market price, it is a tough time for beef producers.

It is difficult to be optimistic about the situation and as well to come up with management and feeding recommendations. The drought has severely reduced many nutritional and management options. However, following are several suggestions that might be helpful.

1. Encourage producers to determine winter feed needs now. This is the first step in making a decision. How much feed will be required for the wintering period? Feed cost is the greatest expense in cow-calf production and is going to be greater due to the dry weather. Feed requirements of the cow herd are influenced by stage of production. A 1000 lb. lactating beef cow will need the equivalent of 24 to 28 lb. of hay. A dry, pregnant cow will need to consume 14 to 16 lb. Multiply these figures by the number days anticipated feeding hay. Make decisions based on these needs. If feed will be needed, purchase it now.
2. Some producers might early wean the calf crop. Review the above recommendation. Note that a dry, pregnant beef cow will need about 40 to 50 percent less feed than a cow nursing a calf. If calves are 4 months old, they can be weaned and fed directly. It would be more efficient to wean the calves and feed them rather than feed the cows to produce milk for the calves. The cows could also improve in condition which would be a plus from a reproductive stand point.
3. Cull and/or sell to match feed supply. Open cows should be the first ones considered followed by older cows and then those with health and structural problems. See later article in this issue of "Update."
4. Consider alternative feed resources. Although this recommendation may be limited, cattle can effectively utilize a wide variety of feed stuffs. In many areas of Tennessee, by product feeds such as distillers grains may be an attractive source. However, the cost may be up this year. Wheat straw, corn stalks, soybean stubble, cottonseed hulls and broiler litter can also be effectively utilized when properly supplemented. Whole cottonseed should be in large supply this fall and winter and can be fed to mature cows at

- 5 to 6 lb. per day to replace hay and silage.
5. Limit feed grain and protein supplement. Some producers have had success in feeding their cows 2 to 3 lb. of grain and protein supplement ration. If producers have corn, crack it and mix it at 6 parts corn to 1 part cottonseed meal and/or soybean meal. The added energy and protein will aid in the utilization of the low quality pasture and hay. Salt has been frequently used as an intake limiter. However, with the shortage of water, this might not be a "good" practice. As an energy source, corn can be fed whole. Grinding or cracking will be needed to mix with other feed stuffs.
 6. Consider supplementing with vitamin A. Normally, forages which are green and actively growing will provide plenty of vitamin A. It is also difficult to create a vitamin A deficiency in mature cows. However, with the feeding of drought stressed, dry forages, a vitamin A deficiency might occur. Vitamin A supplement can be provided in a salt-mineral mix or by injection when working cows this fall.
 7. Control both internal and external parasites. This is always a good practice. However, with a reduced feed supply, parasite control will pay even greater dividends.
 8. Creep feed calves. Calves can be provided either a high energy or high protein creep feed. If water is available, salt can be used to limit feed intake.
 9. If moisture should increase in the late summer or early fall, producers might want to consider stockpiling fescue and sowing small grain pastures. Both of these practices can aid in reduction of feed bill. See the latest issue of "Beef Cattle Time" for additional information.

The above suggestions may be of benefit to aid in relieving the stress of drought. Hopefully, by the time you read this, we have had some rain and things have improved.