

Developing your Drought Management Plan

Drought can happen during any season, but coupled with summer heat the effects it has on cattle producers can be quite dramatic. Dried up pastures, reduced harvested forage yields, and limited water supplies are all potential problems. These problems will effect both short- and long-term management decisions. Immediate attention is needed to relieve shortfalls in enterprise productivity and in some cases sheer animal and ranch survival.

The main concern during drought is to ensure the cowherd's nutritional needs are being met, and negative impacts to range resources are minimized. As forage availability and quality are limited by shortages in rainfall the economic value of grazing forages increase. Supplements that will enhance the remaining supplies and digestibility of forages may be the best alternative to minimize the purchasing of forage replacements, but in todays high priced grain market the benefit/cost of supplements need to be evaluated with a sharp pencil. Grain byproducts that are low in starch content and high in digestible fiber (soybean hulls, wheat midds, corn gluten feed, some cottonseed products) can increase the utilization of low-quality forages.

Reducing or minimizing the nutrient demands of the herd is another area that can be managed. The following options will need consideration in your drought management plan.