

To Northwest Louisiana Beef Listserv:

It is hard to believe that while much of the southern part of Louisiana is concerned about flooding, northwest Louisiana is still concerned about continuing drought conditions. As of May 19th, the Shreveport area was at 60% of normal rainfall for the last 14 months according to the National Weather Service. Other locales were in a similar situation with Natchitoches at 53%, El Dorado, Arkansas at 60%, Texarkana, Arkansas at 66%, and Longview, Texas at 55%. The rains of the last few days, while welcomed, will not likely change these values greatly. These data verify what beef producers in all of northwest Louisiana and adjoining states have seen on their operations; a severe drought has persisted for more than just a few months.

As we move into the hotter summer months, producers will have to make some tough decisions related to their operations. While some of those decisions will be difficult, producers need to focus on operational long-run sustainability and survival of their cattle operation. The old saying “if you take little time to plan, you better allow lots of time for repairs” could become true if quick and hasty decisions are made during difficult times.

The US Drought Monitor is available online at: drought.unl.edu/dm which can be used to begin to estimate how long and severe the potential impact may be. For northwest Louisiana the long range outlook is “drought to persist or intensify.” If drought conditions begin to impact regional and national areas, it is likely that local cattle and feed markets will likely be influenced on a greater scale.

Several years ago under similar situations, the LSU AgCenter published a **Louisiana Beef Cattle Producer Guide to Coping with Drought Conditions**. That guide can be found by going to www.lsuagcenter.com and entering “beef drought guide” in the search box in the upper middle of the page (a direct link is provided at the end of this email). A description of the guide should be the first item that comes up in the search list. The information in the guide is an excellent place from which beef producers can begin to develop and implement strategies for sustainability if the drought in northwest Louisiana continues.

The guide provides over 20 different options producers can consider. As a quick reference, my top six suggestions for producers are listed below, and each should be considered in the order provided.

1. **Assess** herd, feed, and forage inventories as well as other feed and forage resources that will likely be available for the next year. Be as realistic as possible, but also be careful to not overestimate.
2. Begin to **divide** cattle into feeding / management groups based on stage of growth or stage of production to use feed resources efficiently as nutritional needs differ. It is easy to realize that calves, yearlings, replacement heifers, dry and wet cows, and bulls should be in different feeding groups. The easiest way to begin to group either set of cows is on body condition score (BCS). The cow with a BCS of 4 (left) would require additional nutrition compared to the cow with a BCS of 6 (right) to produce a quality calf and rebreed efficiently.



The sketches were obtained from, and appreciation is expressed to, the University of Minnesota Extension Service for their use.

3. **Allocate** available feed / forage resources to those groups to meet their nutritional needs. Base your estimate on the assessment of feed resources and number of head in each group to determine how long the resources can be expected to last.
4. Consider how to **stretch** forage resources.
 - a. Rotational grazing can increase productivity and extend forage availability.

- b. Limit access to hay during daylight hours (8-12 hours) to limit intake and reduce hay waste.
 - c. Forage quality analysis will allow for proper supplementation.
 - d. Minimize storage and feeding losses.
 - e. Consider use of annual forage crops as weather permits.
 - f. Stockpile extra forage in late summer and early fall.
 - g. Feeding losses of one and two year-old hay may be reduced based on preliminary data from a study at the Hill Farm Research Station where the round bales were poured with a liquid protein supplement on one end and allowed to soak for four to eight hours before feeding.
5. Cattle **management** options to consider:
- a. Early weaning of calves will reduce the nutritional drain on the cows as well as reduce forage intake by as much as 15-20%.
 - b. Creep feeding may only be a breakeven proposition on calf weight, but it will reduce the demand on the cows.
 - c. Selective culling to reduce numbers of unproductive cows.
 - d. Provide adequate shade and water.
 - e. Beware of and manage footrot, pinkeye, anaplasmosis, and summer pneumonia problems.
6. If **purchased** feedstuffs will have to be used, consider:
- a. Nutritional value and how it may impact the nutritional or feeding value of other feeds.
 - b. Is the feedstuff available and in a form that can be easily transported to the farm?
 - c. Cost of purchased feeds in relationship to value per unit of TDN or protein.
 - d. How purchased feedstuffs can and will be fed with existing facilities.
 - e. Transportation, storage, handling, spoilage, and shrinkage costs.

Hopefully these suggestions will provide you with a starting place from which you can begin to make plans for addressing issues with drought conditions. If you need additional information on any of these suggestions or any help, please contact your local county agent or me. Most parish extension offices are listed in the white pages under "Louisiana, State of" and then "LSU AgCenter." Feel free to call me at either of the numbers listed below.

Please feel free to pass this information and email on to your friends, neighbors, clients, customers, and others that may be interested.

If you want to unsubscribe from this listserv, reply and put "unsubscribe" in the subject line. If you want to subscribe to this listserv, send an email to anipper@agcenter.lsu.edu with "Beef Listserv" in the subject line.

The direct link to the AgCenter's drought guide mentioned above is: <http://www.lsuagcenter.com/NR/rdonlyres/7E18EC16-D993-418C-AC73-9F87E8EF6784/28706/LAbeefCattleProducerGuidetoCopingwithDroughtCondit.pdf>

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