



The impact of drought on livestock can be devastating. Limited water supplies occur during a time when the water needs are increased. Feed availability can also become limited. Plants can also concentrate toxins making them lethal to livestock. Planning ahead can help protect the health and well-being of your livestock.

Before a Drought

- **Keep up-to-date forage inventories.**
 - Accurate records of available feedstuffs can help you determine available feed supplies during drought situations.
- **Develop an emergency plan for water and feed resources.**
 - Obtain emergency supplies of forage and grain.
 - Alternative feed sources
 - Additional grazing areas
 - Identify emergency resources for water.
 - Plant alternative forage crops.
- **Good land management before a drought provides greater flexibility when droughts occur.**
 - Maintain healthy soils.
 - Balance stocking rates and land resources.
 - Adjust the stocking rate to the point where only 75% of the available forage is utilized.

During a Drought

- **Provide quality water sources.**
 - Ensure animals have a supply of cool, clean water.
 - Truck water in for livestock.
 - Monitor the water temperature and keep it cool.
 - Monitor water sources, such as watering hole, streams and ponds, which can dry out during drought conditions.
 - Check water delivery systems periodically for proper function.
 - Dry conditions can lead to undrinkable or toxic water sources. Have water quality testing performed.
 - Concentration of naturally occurring salts and minerals can be harmful to animal health.
 - Increased nutrients in water can lead to increased growth of blue-green algae, which can be toxic.
- **Feed management.**
 - Avoid overgrazing or overstocking of pasture and rangeland. Forages should never be grazed “to the roots” under any circumstance.
 - Drought situations can also result in increased grazing by livestock on toxic plants.
 - Move animals to additional pastures. This may involve moving them out of the drought affected area.

- Providing supplemental feed (e.g., grains, hay) may be necessary.
 - Non-traditional feedstuffs may be an option.
 - Lease additional pastures.
- Supplemental minerals, vitamins or energy sources may be needed.
- **If feed shortages occur,**
 - You may need to limit the number of animals to conserve water and reduce feed demand.
 - Sell unproductive animals. This option is best considered before the drought becomes too severe.
- **Monitor animals for illness.**
 - If your animals show signs of illness, contact your local veterinarian immediately!
 - **Signs of dehydration:** rapid, shallow breathing
 - reluctance to move
 - weight loss
 - drying of mucous membranes (e.g., eyes, nose, mouth)
 - decreased skin flexibility
 - **Signs of heat stress:** increased respiration rate or panting
 - excessive salivation
 - elevation of the head to make it easier to breathe
 - open mouth breathing

After a Drought

- **If you plan to feed drought damaged crops (e.g., feed, forages) to livestock, be aware of these issues:**
 - Drought conditions can reduce the nutritional quality of forages and lower forage succulence (and protein content).
 - Dry forages are harder to digest.
 - Drought conditions increases plant toxicities (e.g., nitrates, mycotoxins).
 - Test harvested feed and forages for nutrient content and potential toxins prior to feeding.
- **See your county extension office about drought assistance programs and the enrollment process.**

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