Kent County Extension Ag Newsletter

July 29, 2022

**USDA Drought Assistance Program**

Many of you have already gotten word but in case you have not USDA currently has a program to assist producers with losses due to the drought.

LFP(Livestock Forage Disaster Program)- FSA is now accepting applications to provide financial assistance to eligible producers for 2022 grazing losses due to a qualifying drought or fire. The deadline to apply for 2022 LFP assistance is Jan. 30, 2023. Kent County has met the drought severity level to trigger this program. Contact the Kent County FSA office to for more info and to apply.

**Right Of Way Hay Baling**

Due to the extreme drought conditions, the state is allowing landowners to bale hay from the right of way adjacent to their properties. An application must be submitted to the local TXDOT department. Contact the Extension office or TXDOT for an application.

**STOCKING RATE AND GRAZING MANAGEMENT**

**DURING DROUGHT**

When dealing with drought, some of a livestock producer’s most important decisions concern

stocking rates and grazing management. The effects of these decisions go far beyond survival of

the current drought and can greatly influence recovery afterward.

Because no two ranches are identical, managers need to make stocking rate and grazing

management decisions that are compatible with the goals of the operation.

Simply stated, forage supply must meet or exceed livestock demand. If it does not, the lack of

forage base may eventually contribute to the demise of the operation. During a drought, you

must constantly evaluate range forage to match supply with demand.

When supply can no longer meet demand, reducing stocking rates pays big dividends: Desirable

forage plants incur less damage; supplemental feeding cost are reduced; losses to toxic plants are

lowered; and the range recovers more rapidly after the drought.

If stock remain in a pasture too long without adequate forage, long-term carrying capacity for

both livestock and wildlife may be severely reduced. Several kinds of ecological damage can

result:

\* More rainfall runs off when there is too little plant and litter cover on the soil surface.

\* Erosion increases, removing soil needed for plant production.

\* Organic matter in the soil decreases.

\* The plant root mass eventually becomes depleted, reducing the plant’s ability to

recover after grazing or extreme environmental conditions.

\* Undesirable plant species invade.

Removing too much forage compromises a plant’s ability to recover after drought. Future forage

production depends on having healthy plants that can survive drought and recover quickly when

favorable conditions return. To help determine how much forage you have, see Extension

Publication B-1646.

Stocking rate and grazing management decisions made before, during and after a drought can

determine whether plants survive. Plants that have been consistently grazed too close before

drought are much less likely to survive a drought because of their weakened state. Likewise,

excessive grazing after a drought does not give plants the rest needed to recover from dry

conditions.

When drought occurs and forage is scarce, reduce livestock numbers.

Don’t wait too long to de-stock. Early culling means that remaining forage can be allocated to

more valuable animals.

Firs, cull the least valuable and/or higher risk animals: those that will not raise an offspring in

the current year, or that will not raise one next year, or that are at high risk for rebreeding failure.

Try to sell cull cows before they become truly thin and emaciated.

Make systematic culling decisions. Consider culling animals in this order:

(1) Dry, open cows not raising offspring/old cows.

(2) Animals with structural or production defects.

(3) Young replacement females

(4) Cows palpated with short-term pregnancies.

(5) Older animals with offspring at side.

(6) Thin, quality females, with offspring at side.

(7) And as a last resort cull good condition, mid-aged females (4 to 8 year old cows). These

cows are the most productive in the herd and should only be removed in small numbers, only

before complete liquidation.

It is critical that de-stocking is done in a timely fashion. If some culling begins early, total

livestock reduction will likely be less severe.

**Nitrate and Prussic Acid Poison and Hay Testing**

The hot and dry conditions we are currently experiencing can cause toxic levels of prussic acid to occur in many annual forages. While many plants contain the toxic materials, the greatest culprits are Johnson grass, hay grazers or forage sorghums-sudan hybrids, and various millets.

Cattle may succumb to prussic acid poisoning while grazing these forages if they have become drought stressed or in the fall after a light frost. Livestock should not be allowed to graze these plants in a stressed condition as death can occur. Prussic acid poisoning acts rapidly and can kill animals within minutes. Symptoms may include a brief period of stimulation followed by depression and paralysis. Signs of colic may be present. Stupor (loss of sensibility), difficult breathing and frequent convulsions may result. Death is actually caused by suffocation since oxygen remains in the blood and is not exchanged to the tissues. Testing for prussic acid in these forages is possible, however, a true accuracy is unpredictable because many plants in the field may have prussic acid and many may not. Just remember a couple of bites of the poisonous plant can result in death. Producers do have an option of swathing forage sorghums that have prussic acid. When swathed, prussic acid leaves the cut forage when allowed proper time to cure before bailing. However, re-growth of plant material may still be toxic.

Producers turning into new pastures that have not been grazed should also be cautious to the fact that there could be many colonies of Johnson grass growing. These Johnson grass colonies could contain Prussic Acid. The best management option is to wait 2 weeks after good rains to allow the plant to recover from stressed conditions or 7-10 days after a killing freeze before turning cattle into new pastures, hay grazer, or sorghum stubble fields. The 7-10 days will allow the prussic acid to leave the plant just like swathing the hay and letting it cure.

Nitrate poisoning is different in that nitrates accumulate at the base of the plant and move upward. Cattle can tolerate low levels of nitrates in their system and it is only when high levels of nitrates are fed that it becomes toxic. Nitrates do not leave the plant after swathing like prussic acid. Nitrates remain in the hay and that is usually when producers get in trouble, by feeding free choice, high nitrate hay in the winter. Hay can be tested for nitrates and high nitrate hay can be fed on a limited basis. Drought stress in combination with high fertilizer rates usually creates Nitrate problems in haygrazer fields and grain sorghum fields. Raising the cutting height of the swather can aid producers in reducing Nitrate levels. Grazing sorghum fields high in Nitrates is not recommended.

If you would like to test any hay for nitrates or prussic acid one of the closets labs to Kent County is ServiTech in Amarillo. Results are typically ready within about 3 days of the lab receiving the sample. Attached is article with information on collecting samples and interpreting lab results. Contact the ServiTech ot the Extension Office for more information.

**Drought Supplemental Feeding**

The last piece of information I have for you is an article of supplemental feeding of cattle during drought conditions. See attached page.

Please don’t hesitate to contact me at the Extension Office 806-237-3751 or [brandon.cave@ag.tamu.edu](mailto:brandon.cave@ag.tamu.edu). Or on my cell phone 325-236-0928 if there’s anything Kent County Agrilife Extension can assist you with.

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