

## **Headline: Managing Pasture during Drought is Important All Year**

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AGRICULTURE IN THE OZARKS

By David Burton

Summer droughts are really more common than not in southwest Missouri.

In fact, this part of the nation is almost guaranteed to have six to eight weeks of drought conditions nearly every year according to Jay Chism, an agronomy specialist with University of Missouri Extension.

As with any seasonal production problem, Chism says producers need to develop ways to deal with conditions that disrupt forage production.

“For example, producers should develop a pasture management system that will help move livestock through these conditions as economically as possible,” said Chism.

Unfortunately, there is no silver bullet forage that will help in all dry weather situations.

“Instead of looking for the best dry weather forage, it is important to develop both short and long term strategies to combat drought,” said Chism.

Short term management strategies begin with monitoring pasture supply closely.

Producers must avoid over grazing. All forages have a grazing height that producers should not go below.

“Even summer grasses like sudangrass and pearl millet will produce more total yield if they are grazed or hayed properly,” said Chism.

Another strategy is to start feeding supplements earlier in anticipation of dry conditions. Feeding hay earlier may extend limited pasture during the summer months.

Finally, although it is not the most desired strategy, stocking rates may have to be reduced if conditions are severe.

Long term planning also needs to be developed in the winter months.

For starters, if pastures have been thinned from drought conditions, Chism recommends using the winter months to over seed and incorporate legumes into pastures.

“Deep rooted legumes will not only improve the quality of pastures but will also survive dry soil conditions for a longer period of time than many shallow rooted grasses,” said Chism.

Another strategy is to convert 25 to 30 percent of the total acres to a warm-season grass.

“This will help with dry weather planning and will also have the added benefit of reducing the effects of fescue toxicosis,” said Chism.

A third strategy is to watch for favorable prices of reserve supplies of feed.

“As with anything, if you wait until everyone is looking for hay, then you probably won’t get the best price,” said Chism.

The final long term strategy is to develop a simple rotational grazing program. Many area producers have recently adopted rotational grazing systems. These systems can increase forage use from 30 percent to as high as 60 percent.

“While next seasons’ drought seems like a long ways away, it is still a good time to start thinking about strategies that will work on your farm,” said Chism.

### **EARLY NOTICE**

The 27th Annual Missouri Small Fruit and Vegetable Conference – which includes tours and workshops -- is scheduled for Feb. 12 -14 in Springfield, Mo.

For more information contact the Patrick Byers or Pamela Mayer at 547-7500.

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