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Contact: Eldon Cole, livestock specialist

Headquartered in Lawrence County

Tel: (417) 466-3102

E-mail: colee@missouri.edu

Livestock Producers Should Plan Strategies Now for Dealing with Drought Conditions

There are no magic formulas for helping livestock producers cope with drought according to Eldon Cole, livestock specialist, University of Missouri Extension.

“Some producers will be able to handle a drought with only minor inconvenience, said Cole.

A producer that is not overstocked, uses management intensive grazing, water’s livestock from wells instead of ponds and streams and has some hay carryover can ride a drought out.

“When it comes to living with the drought, those practices should be considered. Then again, those practices also take money and time,” said Cole.

For a short-term quick management practice, Cole says selling low-end cows or moving out yearlings (that would normally run until July), would be feasible.

“This spring, all fall-calving cows should be pregnancy checked and open ones, especially old ones, should be sold,” said Cole.

Another step livestock producers can take to deal with drought is to rotate pastures as much as the existing water supply allows.

“Move the cattle fairly fast so they don't grub pastures into the ground. Supplement with hay if you can find it along with other supplementation. Just be sure you shop around for the cheapest source of energy,” said Cole.

According to Cole, livestock producers would also be wise to scour their neighborhood for unused pastures and offer to rent them.

“That may be cheaper than hauling water or buying a lot of hay. It can be inconvenient if the land is too far away and, at the same time, there is the added risk of cattle theft if the pasture is too far from your home,” said Cole.

At the same time, Cole does not recommend being too hasty in selling a lot of cattle. Instead, try to get down to a manageable number of the best producing cows.

“Keep in mind that the topic of dealing with drought takes a great deal of consideration because each farm is so variable,” said Cole.

For more information, contact any of the MU Extension livestock specialists in southwest Missouri: Eldon Cole in Mt. Vernon, (417) 466-3102; Gary Naylor in Dallas County, (417) 345-7551; and Dona Funk in Cedar County, (417) 276-3313.

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