



Pasture/Forage Management During a Drought

The continuing precipitation shortage which began in March 2016 has brought many challenges this grazing season. Questions have arisen regarding pasture management during a drought. Here are some steps to take now and as we move through the rest of the grazing season.

Short-term:

1. Get livestock off the pastures. Pastures will suffer greatly from overgrazing and hoof traffic. It opens the soil to additional heating and moisture loss. Feed hay in a barnyard or sacrifice area.
2. This may be time to sell some animals. Feeding stored feed now can be very expensive. Restock your herd or flock when grazing conditions improve.
3. Make sure adequate clean water is available. Pasture plants have much less moisture in them and hot temperatures increase consumption.
4. To clip or not to clip? If pastures are dense, otherwise healthy, don't clip or graze below 4-6". It is tempting to do that, but hurts the pastures long-term. If pastures are weedy, clip to prevent seedheads from forming, no shorter than 4".

Mid-term:

1. Take inventory of your stored feed [(upright or bunk silo capacity: <http://nwnyteam.cce.cornell.edu/submission.php?id=589&crumb=forages>), (estimating hay needs: <http://smallfarms.oregonstate.edu/sfn/f13wtrhay>, (Hay Calculator: <http://economics.ag.utk.edu/haycalculator.html>)]. Drought has reduced forage yields so purchase enough for the remainder of the grazing season and winter. Store hay properly to prevent losses. Cover if possible.
2. Wean early. Non-lactating livestock have lower nutrient requirements and can be fed lower-quality feed. Save higher quality forage for youngstock. Another option would be to sell youngstock earlier than you normally would.
3. Plant cool season annuals, such as rye, oats, turnips, or radishes for fall grazing or harvest. Success will be dependent on return to normal rains. Bale corn stalks or soybean residue or set up temporary fence and graze crop residue or cover crops (http://beefmagazine.com/mag/beef_nutritional_content_crop).
4. If some significant rains occur, apply 50 lbs actual nitrogen to pastures and hayfields to boost fall growth. Leave plenty of residual (6") heading into winter. Fertilize with potassium and phosphorus as needed according to soil test reports.

Long-term:

1. Plan to frost-seed in March any pastures that were impacted from overgrazing or drought conditions
(<http://nwnyteam.cce.cornell.edu/submission.php?id=515&crumb=grazing|4>).
2. Apply 100 lbs actual nitrogen at green-up to boost early grazing. Harvest any surplus pasture.
3. Work to improve soil health so pastures are more resilient in drought conditions. Develop a rotational grazing system if not currently utilizing one. Move livestock often and provide sufficient periods of recovery
([http://www2.ca.uky.edu/grazer/May14 Rotational vs Continuous Grazing.php](http://www2.ca.uky.edu/grazer/May14_Rotational_vs_Continuous_Grazing.php)).