

10 Suggested Strategies for Cow-Calf Management in Drought Conditions

Sometimes when drought is imminent or has hit an area, cattle producers struggle with what possibilities exist that might help in handling the situation. To say the least, drought is stressful on the cattle, but can also put a great deal of mental and economic stress on the manager. Below are 10 suggested strategies that may assist producers in coping with the job at hand.

1. Develop a plan before conditions are out of hand and force you to do something that is extremely costly.
2. Consider splitting your pastures and rotationally grazing the paddocks. This allows a rest period for the grass and if rain does come it is likely to respond quicker. Also rotational grazing reduces selectivity in a cow's grazing habit, enhances forage utilization rate and can improve pasture carrying capacity by 10 to 30%.
3. Consider early weaning your calves. This strategy can reduce pressure on the pasture by 25 to 35%. Additionally, this practice will reduce the cow's nutritional demand by 30 to 40%.
4. Identify late calving, unsound and poor producing cows and cull them from the herd. Prices this year are favorable for culling.
5. If pastures become extremely short, consider weaning the calves and drylotting the cows. During early and mid pregnancy the non-lactating beef cow can be fed on as little as 10 –12 lbs. of corn, 2-3 lbs. of hay and 2 lbs. of protein supplement.
6. Consider creep feeding calves to maintain gain in short pasture situations. Be aware this is not an efficient way of putting gain on calves. Creep feeding will also reduce some pressure on pasture, but does not have the impact of the early weaning strategy.
7. Look ahead and plan your fall and winter feed supply. How can I best utilize my feed with minimal waste and supplement it at the lowest cost possible? What feeds are available at lowest cost? Will tub grinding and putting together total mixed rations stretch my feed supply and reduce my overall wintering costs?
8. In low rainfall years there many times are opportunities to harvest low yielding corn fields in the form of silage. Plan ahead where and how this feed can be stored. Also look ahead at finding a custom harvester and

possibly consider storing this crop in a sealed bag to minimize storage loss and maintain feed quality.

9. Grazing standing corn may be a more cost effective method of providing winter feed for the cows than trying to buy higher priced hay. Daily strip grazing controls waste and limits the risk of acidosis with the cows. Cattle need to be adjusted to grain prior to exposure to standing corn. Demonstration using this technique with cows has shown 100 to 200 cow days per acre depending on the amount of corn grain yield.
10. When pastures get short the best management practice may be to drylot cows or restrict them to 10% of the pasture area. This prevents damage to the pasture stand and allows faster recovery of the pasture once rains return.

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