

## Weekly Ag Report

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Prices for all classes of cattle have remained well above historical averages, in spite of a slightly weaker cattle market since June. The downtrend in the market has mostly been caused by a drought stricken corn crop in America's Heartland. Beef producers across the West are also dealing with very dry conditions and subsequent wildfires. The lack of forage could cause producers to liquidate cattle or start feeding hay earlier than normal. The impact of the wildfires, although already affecting some ranchers, will largely be felt in the coming years with the possibility of decreased grazing allocations on public lands and the damage to primary sage grouse habitat. Cattlemen will be hoping for a wet fall to jumpstart forage growth on winter range.

Drought has many effects on a beef producer's bottom line. Some things are obvious (lighter calves at sale time, restless cattle behavior, and a smaller hay stack) while others may be harder to realize until next year (lower pregnancy rates, degraded forage resources, and lower levels of immunity). During droughts, it is important for producers to have a plan of action so they will be better prepared to deal with droughts.

The Noble Foundation, located in Ardmore, OK, has developed a list of strategies to help producers, in the long term, avoid crisis in times of drought:

1. Adjust stocking rate to the carrying capacity of dry years, then take advantage of favorable years with alternative enterprises such as retained ownership, stockers, etc.
2. Know the seasonal forage flow and be prepared to adjust the stock flow accordingly.
3. Plan for water availability. Gain access to large water reservoirs or well water if possible. Graze areas with limited water reserves first.
4. Add additional fencing. Crossfences increase the number of paddocks, increasing the ability to control graze and rest periods. Avoid the temptation to "throw open" all of the gates.
5. Lengthen pasture rest periods during slow or no growth times. Plants can withstand severe grazing if followed by proper rest periods. These rest periods allow plants time to replenish tissues above and below the ground.
6. Know critical dates for rainfall and forage growth. These dates coincide with seasonal temperatures and day length that directly affect the forage flow of the forage types.
7. Have animals selected in advance to sell. Establish levels of culling, such as: first level, open cows; second level, low or poor producers; third level, growing stock and large calves; fourth level, old cows and nonconformers, etc.
8. Consider early weaning to avoid poor conception the next year. During droughts, forages decline rapidly in quality as well as quantity. Wean calves before the end of the breeding season to decrease the cows' nutrient requirements by half, which could mean the difference between rebreeding or not.
9. Plan, monitor, and replan. Establish a forage/grazing plan calendar outlining expected seasonal forage production. Monitor utilization, production and rainfall. Compare expected production figures with past records relative to rainfall. Make needed adjustments.
10. Only drought feed for a good reason! It is usually more cost efficient to move cattle to a location with abundant forage, than to have forage shipped to an area in drought.