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Limited Forage Availability, Now What?

K-State Research and Extension has a booth at the Topeka Farm Show and I took my turn on a shift. There were funny looks from folks who tried to engage me in conversation about K-State basketball, given my obvious lack of knowledge there, as frankly I could care less about that season or any basketball game. That's not to say that KSRE employees are not dedicated to our University, but there is good researched-based, information from other Universities. Today's discussion, for example, references some good work done at Oklahoma State University.

Looking at the national drought monitor, the majority of states west of the Mississippi river are continuing to deal with some level of drought; with Kansas, Nebraska & Oklahoma at the epicenter of severe drought. Most cow calf producers in this region are into winter feeding with access to very limited hay supplies and stockpiled forage compared to "normal". This means that typical approaches to maintaining cowherds have 1) become much more expensive or 2) are simply not available. Therefore, it has become time to look for Plan B, C or D!

Information that provides guidelines for alternative winter-feeding methods can be found in an Oklahoma State University Extension Fact Sheet: ANSI-3034 called "[Management of Cows with Limited Forage Availability](#)". This is an excellent publication, specifically as you look at the guidance given in regard to limit feeding options. In this fact sheet you will find:

- Culling suggestions (*if that has not already been done*)
- Recommendations about how much hay is needed if it is to be purchased
- Limit-feeding grain with limited forage available
- Suggested complete diets for cows fed in dry lots
- Limit energy concentrate feeding management tips
- Limit feeding of hay

While there are some successfully proven approaches referenced here, most of them will require more intensive management, equipment and a watchful producer's eye. If your operation is not set up to feed more concentrated diets, with more management, this may not be practical. Another consideration might be that these systems generally require greater concentration of animals into feedlots or sacrifice pastures/paddocks, which will likely have additional side-effects down the road. Be aware too, that these are not "cheap" fixes and grain-based and grain by-product diets are inflated this year, given the higher commodity and input prices.

Now, to prove that I do bleed purple, K-State's Dr. Jaymelynn Farney, composed a [Beef Tips](#) article on this same topic in 2018, covering some similar considerations. She well illustrates the benefit to simply dividing up the cow herd by production status, body condition, age, etc... and selectively feeding to the various groups, by nutritional needs. If physical space and equipment is an option to implement this approach, it doesn't have much additional cost.

There are some interesting discussions happening throughout the animal agriculture industry, and it is defiantly a year to look at some "outside the box" thinking. Look at what your situation is, look for alternative methods in many forms and have those plans B, C & D at your disposal, should you need them. If fog days are accurate, a wetter spring is coming, so let's all keep up positive thinking and focus on what we can control.