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Wouldn't You Know It?

I took my laptop to a training at Great Bend, and it gave me great fits! So I called our IET department and tried some "over the phone" fixes. Because I couldn't hook up to the Internet, they requested it be taken to KSU to be worked on. No problem. They wouldn't let me out of the place, until I signed a waiver and we inspected the laptop together. You see, the IET department didn't want me to come back and say they had scratched it, or lost a key. Completely understandable! They emailed, the laptop was fixed and ready to be picked up, which I had arranged for my coworker to pick it up, while in Manhattan. That night on the 10 o'clock news I hear about a fire in the library at K-State. Northwest corner they say, 4th floor. "Oh good", I thought my laptop is on the first floor, northwest corner.

Needless to say, the laptop was a fire casualty, thank goodness for insurance!

It looks to be a smaller hay crop this year, planning now can be insurance for the future. One strategy is to adjust the number of head

to reduce and balance total forage required with available forage supply usually is the most economical alternative. Cull late calving cows, older cows, and less productive cows. Cull early to avoid selling when prices are low because everyone else is selling. Consider culling females that are in the bottom 15% to 20% of production for two to three years in succession. These females may be telling you that they don't "fit" for some reason. If there is a time when individual records are valuable in management decisions, this is one. Depopulation is the initial step in adjusting livestock inventory to forage availability.

Remove yearlings from pasture early and sell or drylot. One of the advantages of having a yearling enterprise along with a cow/calf enterprise is if pasture becomes limited, yearlings can be sold or moved to the feedlot and the calf making factory can be kept intact.

Usually in drought conditions, early weaning calves are more effective than creep feeding. Lactational pressure is not removed from the dam when calves are creep-fed. Data from the University of Illinois indicates early-weaned calves are efficient at converting feed to calf gain. If calves are early weaned, consider retaining them to take advantage of the efficient gain. Another reason to consider retaining early-weaned calves is they are light at weaning and, if sold right off the cow, usually don't generate enough dollars to cover annual cow costs. There is a body of data that indicates that early weaned calves exposed to high energy diets soon after weaning have a high propensity to grade USDA Choice or higher. Data collected at the University of Nebraska indicate that 250 to 350 pound calves will consume about 5 pounds of grass daily on a dry matter basis. There is also a saving in forage intake between a lactating and nonlactating female. Bred cows can get by on minimal forage if not suckling calves.

Use existing forage resources efficiently. It seems that the greatest benefit of cross-fencing pastures and having a rotational grazing system occurs when managing through drought conditions.

Grazing systems don't have to be extensive, but allowing pastures to have a rest period in drought condition aids grass persistence. In addition, if carrying capacity is lowered during drought, improved grazing management minimizes the impact of drought on grasses.

Consider some of the following grazing management techniques during drought.

- Construct temporary cross-fences within larger pastures to concentrate grazing. This encourages cattle to more completely use whatever forage available and defers grazing on the other pastures, allowing them to accumulate more growth before being grazed. Be sure to provide enough time for adequate plant recovery before grazing the pasture again.
- Skim or flash graze each pasture very briefly with a high concentration of livestock early in the grazing season to use plants that otherwise would become mature and left ungrazed if grazing is delayed. Typical examples include sedges, cheatgrass and downy brome, bluegrass, and early forbs.
- Temporary electric fencing and hauling water may be needed to control when and where cattle graze certain areas. Be especially cautious of poisonous plants as well as nitrates, prussic acid, and grass tetany. Some plants that are not normally consumed may poison livestock when forage supply is low.
- Avoid overgrazing rangeland, otherwise recovery following drought will be slow and production depressed for an extended time.

- Time grazing in pastures with questionable water supply or quality early in the grazing season when water demand by cattle will be less.

Additional forage supplies can be developed. These options, though, must be chosen with great care because they may be expensive relative to other alternatives, such as de-stocking or relocating cows. Following are some forage feeding opportunities. Cut winter wheat for hay instead of grain, especially if low grain yields are expected and price is low. Ammoniate your wheat straw. Oats could be planted as early as possible for grazing or for hay. Oats use spring moisture very efficiently to produce forage. Use alfalfa for pasture instead of hay. In this situation, other winter feed supplies will be needed. Protect cattle from bloat. Consider green-chopped alfalfa or hay meadows and feed daily instead of grazing or harvesting as hay. This minimizes losses and stretches feed supply to its maximum, but it can be expensive. Plant summer annual forage grasses like sudangrass and millets. These plants are drought resistant but will need some summer moisture for economical growth. Always test summer annuals for nitrates. If nitrates are high, mix with low nitrate feeds and adapt cows. Graze corn, especially dryland corn with depressed yields. Corn provides high carrying capacity and quality for a "salvage" operation, but cross-fence and introduce cattle slowly to avoid digestive problems.

If pasture is available and you want to extend the pasture, feed 4 to 6 pounds of alfalfa per head per day. Alfalfa could be fed three times a week to save on fuel and labor. Grain co-products are feeds to consider when trying to extend existing pasture. Grain co-products do not reduce digestibility of forages, so feeding them in a diet that is primarily forage will not have any negative associative effects.