



Kent Stanford
Regional Extension Agent
News Release

Drought Will Force Farmers to Make Tough Selection Decisions

Dr. Lisa Kriese-Anderson, Alabama Cooperative Extension System Animal Scientist, writes about tough decisions farmers face because of the severe drought in Alabama:

“As drought conditions worsen and hay and pasture supplies are depleted, Alabama cattle producers are facing tough selection decisions. Without adequate and economical feed and water sources, cattle producers will need to reduce cattle numbers.

Calves are the place to start. To reduce nutritional requirements of the cow herd, wean your calves. Dry cows require less nutritious feed than lactating cows. If you have a place to wean the calves and a low cost, alternative source of nutritious feed, put weight on the calves and market in the fall. Heavier weights always will pay off if the cost of the alternative feed is reasonable. If you do not have a place to put the calves, market them immediately.

Purebred producers should calculate weaning age before weaning calves. Make sure calves are within the age window for purebred associations to accept weaning data. With the acceptance of the early weaning practice in other parts of the United States, most breed associations have an age range for early weaned calves.

Next have your veterinarian pregnancy check the entire herd. Also evaluate each cow for feet and leg soundness, udder quality, teeth condition and disposition. Cull all open cows and those with any physical defects. Evaluate cows for body condition score. It will be really important to have cows in body condition of 5 to 6 at calving. Those cows that are in very poor condition need to be culled if you are unable to feed them economically to a body condition score of 5 before calving.

If you still need to cull more cows, this is where record keeping pays off. Rank your cows by their production records. Most computerized records report the Most Probable Producing Ability (MPPA) for each cow. MPPA indicates in ratio form how each cow is expected to produce given her past performance history. Cull the lowest producing cows in the herd. If you have non-computerized records and would like to calculate MPPA values on each cow, contact your Alabama Regional Animal Science and Forages REA, Kent Stanford for assistance.

Another source of cattle to cull is herd bulls. If a herd bull is already on the list to be replaced, go ahead and market him. In extreme situations, market all herd bulls to reduce the number of cattle on pasture. Bulls can be replaced by the breeding season from many quality, highly reputable sources in Alabama.

If a producer sells livestock because of the drought, some of the income may be postponed into a later tax year. For example, cows that have to be sold over and above what is normally culled may be classified as an involuntary conversion. Discuss this with your accountant or with one of Extension's farm management analysis economists. Regional Extension Agent, Kent Stanford, can put you in touch with the one closest to you.

Producers cannot forget, no matter the age of cattle, that a minimum of 0.5 percent of body weight of roughage must be supplied daily to keep the rumen functioning. Producers need to carefully estimate their forage supplies, alternative feed supplies and body weight of their cattle. Keeping the body condition score of cows and profit/loss margins in mind will dictate the amount of culling needed to survive the drought."

If you have questions or would like more information on this topic please contact Kent Stanford, Regional Extension Agent-Animal Science and Forages, at the St. Clair County Extension office, (205) 338-9416 or email stanfmk@auburn.edu. For more information about the drought, please visit our website at www.aces.edu/StClair. Just click on: Dealing with Drought Conditions.

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