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Livestock and Natural Resources

It seems most of the District is in a moderate drought. Livestock enthusiast are anxious! Planning now can help ease the mind. While there is no single right or wrong answer of what to do, there are some strategies that producers can consider as they plan how to battle these conditions."

There is the old saying that you cannot feed your way out of a drought. Buying feed can get expensive. You can easily spend more than you would ever be able to recover. In some cases, producers might want to consider selling part of a herd (cows, calves, animals that are not easy keeping) instead of investing large amounts of money in feed. Easier said than done, reviewing your herd records can aid in this decision.

Producers need to determine how much capital they are willing to spend to keep the herd intact. Biting the bullet now by selling some cows will keep you from spending money feeding the poorer cows in the herd

Rotationally grazing, and giving paddocks some rest will help with grazing efficiency. Of course, if there is no moisture for regrowth this may not work.

If the situation continues to worsen, producers should consider moving their cows to a "sacrificial pasture" to be fed. This practice allows other pastures to rest. This will lower costs for feed hauling and the time spent driving to different pastures. If producers rent pastures, they should inform their landlord about plans to let pastures rest.

Producers may be able to feed less expensive alternatives. Corn, wheat and soybean prices are the lowest they have been in a while. Supplementing can also reduce forage intake.

With the perceived shortage of hay this fall, consider ammoniating wheat straw. Ammoniating improves the hay nutritive value. It also improves digestibility, intake and the crude protein level. The ammoniating can also inhibit mold and fungus growth.

A few years ago, we did some ammoniating demonstrations. It is pretty simple; first determine the weight of the bales you will be using. Weigh at least 5 bales to get a good idea of the average weight. Research has shown that approximately 3% ammonia on a roughage dry matter basis provides good results. For example, 10% moisture content on wheat straw has 90% dry matter which equates to 1800 pounds of dry matter per ton of straw (2000 X .90).

Pile them in a pyramid, cover with a single sheet of 6 or 8 mil black polyethylene. Make sure there are no holes or tears, put 8 or more inches of soil around the pile to make it air tight.

We do have hoses and manifolds that you can borrow to make the application easier. Apply ammonia slowly no more than 30 pounds of ammonia per minute. Slow application will minimize ballooning and stretching of the plastic sheet.

With this warm weather, you can feed within 2 weeks, as the weather cools the waiting to feed time increases. Be extremely cautious using Anhydrous ammonia, wear protective equipment, bleed off hose pressure before disconnecting. If you can have the tank with the right amount of anhydrous, then you can just empty the tank. It's important to only ammoniate low quality forages that are dry. Do not feed to cows that have calves under one month of age.

What does this cost? Depending on the cost of anhydrous, ammoniating costs around $25 to $40 per ton of roughage. If you need additional details or want to borrow our hoses, give me a call.