

## Dry Weather Management for Cattle

It is not uncommon for Arkansas summers to be very hot and dry. As summer begins, cattle usually are in good body condition, but the pastures can dry up very quickly. Hot weather stress is particularly hazardous to closely confined cattle such as show cattle. High relative humidity when the temperature is at or above 80°F adds to the likelihood of profit-stealing losses. Temperatures above 100°F are always dangerous and if the humidity is above 25 percent, the situation is “Emergency.” When conditions are at the emergency level, all handling of cattle should be kept at a minimum. Provide shade if possible and plenty of fresh water.

Listed below are some beef cattle management suggestions for dry weather conditions.

1. **Provide a Good Water Supply.** Cattle require greater amounts of water during hot weather.
2. **Check the Herd Routinely.** Check for good health, body condition and soundness – eyes, feet, teeth, udder, etc.
3. **Inventory Feed Resources.** Estimate as accurately as possible the amount of hay available. Include crop residues or other sources of roughage. Check on the cost and availability of crop byproduct feeds such as soybean hulls, corn gluten feed, whole cottonseed, rice bran, cottonseed hulls, etc. If feed supplies are inadequate, consider alternative feeding and management options to most efficiently maintain the herd.
4. **Cull the Herd.** Sell open cows, old cows, unsound cows (injured, diseased, pendulous udder, short or missing teeth, etc.), cows which produce lightweight calves and late calving cows. Keep young, productive cows and the best replacement heifers and bulls.
5. **Wean Calves Early.** Cows nursing calves have about double the energy and protein needs of dry cows. Calves can be weaned as young as six to eight weeks of age and started on a complete ration. Young calves require a good quality feed with adequate levels of protein, TDN, minerals and vitamins. After calves are weaned, cows can be maintained on a minimum amount of forage. Cows should be maintained in a moderate body condition. It’s generally cheaper to feed the cow and calf separately than it is to feed the cow, which feeds the calf.
6. **Creep Feeding or Creep Grazing.** If milk production declines, nursing calves receive inadequate nutrition to grow properly. Creep feeding or preferably creep grazing (which probably won’t be available during droughts) may be used to maintain adequate calf gains. Calves usually prefer milk to grass so they will first take whatever milk is available and, therefore, creep feeding or creep grazing doesn’t reduce nutrient needs of the cow.
7. **Provide Cattle on Pasture Supplemental Feedstuffs.** Hay is often the least expensive supplement to feed cattle on pasture. However, during periods of drought, other feeds (grains, protein supplements, range cubes, etc.) may provide a cheaper source of nutrients.
8. **Have Forage Tested and Feed Balanced Rations.** Efficiently use available forage by having it tested and balance rations to avoid overfeeding or underfeeding mistakes.
9. **Use Appropriate Feed Additives.** Monensin (Rumensin®) fed to beef cows, replacement heifers or stockers at the recommended levels will reduce hay or pasture requirements by about 10 percent. Lasalocid (Bovatec®) will improve feed efficiency in calves, replacement heifers and stockers.
10. **Supply Adequate Minerals and Vitamins.** Nutrient needs for phosphorus and other minerals and vitamins should be met, especially during periods of drought.

Provide a good free-choice mineral-vitamin supplement year-round.

11. **Consider Poultry Litter and Other Alternative Feeds.** Identify the cheapest sources of protein, energy and roughage for a given situation and then use those feeds to balance a ration for the cattle that must be fed. Broiler litter is usually preferred to turkey litter but either may be used as a cheap source of protein and minerals for beef cattle if they are good quality and adequately processed.
12. **Group Cattle for Feeding.** Don't feed all cattle together in one group. Separate the herd into groups based on nutrient needs. Dry cows need less than cows nursing calves. Replacement heifers and first-calf heifers have higher requirements than mature cows. Distinct management groups of cattle in most beef herds are (1) dry cows, (2) cows nursing calves, (3) first-calf heifers, (4) weanling replacement heifers, (5) bred yearling heifers and (6) bulls.
13. **Avoid Nitrate and Prussic Acid Poisoning.** Environmental conditions which retard plant growth often cause excessive accumulation of nitrate and prussic acid in plants. If forage is suspect, have it tested for these poisons. Most common accumulators of nitrates ranked from highest to lowest are weeds, corn, sorghums, sudangrass, cereal grains, tame forage grasses and legumes. Nitrate accumulates primarily in lower stems. Prussic acid accumulates primarily in the leaves.
14. **Maintain Herd Health.** Continue to follow recommended guidelines for vaccinating cattle and controlling flies and other external and internal parasites.
15. **Avoid Feed Waste.** Plan feeding to avoid waste. Unroll large round bales or use ring feeders to prevent wastage of hay. May limit-feed hay to make cattle eat all of it, especially if grain or other feeds will be supplied.