

Ag Column
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Livestock Considerations for Current Drought

Our region is close to a critical drought, and possibly already there in some areas. Our rainfall over the past 8 to 9 months has been highly variable. I had many conversations with farmers this year of situations where one person had a good rain and a neighbor just a half mile way didn't get any rain.

Due to very limited rainfall and a record number of days over 90 degrees, most livestock producers have been feeding hay for several weeks. The U.S. Drought Monitor shows our area currently in a moderate to severe drought.

Due to the critically dry conditions, UT Extension has released a website to assist livestock owners with dealing with the drought condition. The website can be found at <https://extension.tennessee.edu/Pages/ANR-CED-Drought.aspx>.

The drought assistance website is a great resource for ideas on meeting the needs of livestock. You'll find great webinars and publications by UT Extension specialists. You'll also find links to the U.S. Drought Monitor, the Tennessee Department of Agriculture, the Farm Service Agency, utbeef.com, and extension.tennessee.edu.

Hay likely will be very limited this year given the conditions of 2016. We got off to a rough start with a dry and late spring. Many livestock producers fed hay into late April depleting winter hay supplies more than usual. The dry spring also resulted in a short hay crop in many areas. Many producers fed hay for 10 to 12 weeks in the late summer and early fall even further depleting limited hay supplies.

The Tennessee Farm Bureau maintains a Hay Directory to assist producers with finding hay. You can find the hay directory at this website, www.tn.gov/agriculture/article/ag-farms-hay.

Please consider some of the following measures to extend your hay supplies. UT Extension offers forage testing services to help producers effectively make the most of their hay supplies. If you know your hay quality, you can consider limit feeding hay to make it go further. Several good hay unrollers are available to make hay feeding easier.

If your hay supplies are insufficient for the coming winter, you may want to consider culling older and less productive cows. Consider pregnancy checking cows to avoid feeding open cows all winter. This alone could easily save \$200 in hay costs per cow.

A good supply of water is critical for livestock. If the drought persists, you should check water sources daily to insure livestock have adequate drinking water.

For more information, call your local Extension Office.