

Acreage management considerations during a drought

“Take Half, Leave Half,” is a grazing rule of thumb which Mindy Hubert, SDSU Extension small acreage field specialist, says has taken on a new meaning during the drought.

“This is a difficult management technique to implement when the plant is less than half of its previous year’s total growth before grazing season even started,” Hubert said.

Although the drought has taken its toll on pastures and hay availability, Hubert provides a list of management tips to help acreage managers to minimize the negative impact of the drought on their land and pocketbook:

- **Save your pastures:** Even with the sky-high price of hay, the long-term damage that can be done to pastures by overgrazing is not worth the extra day or two of not feeding hay to horses.

- **Monitor pastures:** Pastures that lasted two months last year, might not last even one month this year. Don’t assume, but rather check the pasture every few days and remove animals before half the forage has been removed. In certain areas of South Dakota, grasshoppers are accounting for a significant amount of forage removal.

- **Buy hay in bulk:** Get together with other livestock owners and share the shipping costs, if

necessary. Buy round bales or large square bales, if you have the equipment to handle them. For more information on where to locate hay, contact Hubert at (605) 394-1722 or mindy.hubert@sdstate.edu.

- **Budget:** Estimate annual feed consumption and be sure to purchase enough hay, knowing that pastures won’t last as long as they have the past couple of wet years. Otherwise livestock owners will run short and the price of hay will only increase as we enter the winter. If acreage managers cannot afford to feed all of their livestock, they may have to consider selling them or, if feasible, taking out a feed loan. “If the numbers just don’t pencil out, don’t put yourself at financial risk,” Hubert advises.

- **Feed efficiency:** Invest in a quality hay feeder that minimizes waste. Horses can waste more than 50 percent of a round bale if not placed in a feeder. Feeder type can also greatly affect the amount of waste. For more information, visit iGrow Horse (<http://igrow.org/livestock/horse/>) today. Monitor your animals’ body condition and don’t over feed. Consider limiting the time they spend at the hay feeder.

For more information, visit igrow.org.

Drought Monitor largely unchanged

Conditions on the U.S. Drought Monitor were largely unchanged except for a small area over the Black Hills which was reduced from Extreme Drought (D3) to Severe Drought (D2), says Dennis Todey, SDSU state climatologist.

“Recent rainfalls over the area and somewhat cooler conditions reduced the impact of the drought conditions,” Todey said. “Over the last 30 days the central Black Hills have actually received above average precipitation.”

Although this has helped ease some concerns, Todey says the Black Hills remain in Severe Drought.

He adds that the rains have also helped green-up some pasture and rangeland in some areas of the west, helping ease the fire danger slightly.

The rest of the drought status statewide was unchanged, as some precipitation and cooler temperatures keep conditions from worsening.

Todey says recipitation totals, though, were not sufficient to indicate improved conditions.

“Some small areas did receive some precipitation mid-week. These areas along with some small areas from last week could be in time to help soybeans recover some yield,” said Laura Edwards, SDSU Extension climate field specialist. “They will also help people that still have corn get closer to maturity.”

Both Todey and Edwards noted that while the map is released on Thursday morning each week, the cut-off time for data is 7 a.m. Tuesday. Thus, any precipitation after that point must be incorporated on the next week’s map.

SDSU Extension will provide weekly drought briefings throughout the 2012 growing season. To keep up to date on how the drought is impacting South Dakota’s agriculture industry, visit iGrow.org.

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