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Managing Pastures During and After Drought

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Drought provides dramatic evidence of the role of short- and long-term management of native rangeland and tame pastures. Proper management of range and pasture resources during drought is critical for sustainable livestock production and centers on one key strategy: **reducing stocking rate**.

Failure to reduce stocking during drought may result in one or all of the following consequences:

- Destruction of plant growth buds needed for re-growth.
- Lost ability of the pasture to capture snow that serves as an insulating blanket and decreases winterkill of plants.
- Decreased water infiltration from precipitation due to increased runoff, which decreases the amount of precipitation available to plants for growth and reproduction.
- A change in the plant community, which could decrease future production.
- Increase in invasive, non-productive, plant species.

Proper range and pasture management during drought:

- Reduce stocking rate using one or more of the following strategies:
 - Dry lot livestock. This requires facilities and increases labor and manure.
 - Early wean calves. This reduces cows' demand for forage by 20%.
 - Supplemental feed cows or creep feed calves. Hay and energy supplements can replace feed from pastures. Protein supplements can actually increase forage demand.
 - Remove cattle either through selling or by shipping them to another area not affected by drought.
 - Designate a sacrifice pasture where supplements are fed. This limits negative impacts to a confined area.

Proper range and pasture management during recovery from drought:

- Continue reduced stocking rates for at least one year to allow for recovery.
- Delay turnout using supplemental feeds.
- Graze cereal grains or annual grasses like sudangrass to defer grazing on pastures.
- Fertilize tame pastures to boost recovery.
- Be diligent in control of invasive species.

For more detailed information on range and pasture management during drought, refer to the website <http://ars.sdstate.edu/extbeef/> or contact your local Extension educator or state range specialist. This publication can be accessed electronically from the SDSU College of Agriculture & Biological Sciences publications page at <http://agbiopubs.sdstate.edu/articles/ExEx2033.pdf> or from the Extension Service Drought Information Website at <http://sdces.sdstate.edu/drought/>

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