



Deal with Drought: Tips for Farmers

Dealing with drought conditions is a reality any farmer, livestock owner or gardener may have to face. Here are some tips for caring for your livestock and crops during dry weather.

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Other Advice?

Do you have any suggestions for dealing with drought and dry weather on your farm? Let us know: Drop us a note! The heavy, dark clouds finally gave up a short downpour after threatening for days.

Still, here in central Kentucky, where our editorial offices are located, we're about 4 to 5 inches below normal for precipitation.

Drought Assistance for Farmers The Farm Service Agency (FSA) administers and manages farm commodity, credit, conservation, disaster and loan programs. Farm Credit Services Commercial banks Your county extension office can provide more details.

Coping with the effects that dry weather or drought has on your crops and/or livestock can become a reality for any farmer, livestock owner or gardener.

Don't forget to take care of yourself. Talk about any feelings of anger, frustration and related stress rather than isolating from family or neighbors.

Compiled below are tips to help you prepare and manage with drought and dry weather. Your local university cooperative extension office can also offer guidance.

General Drought Preparedness and Response Tips Examine your water use efficiency and irrigation needs. Look carefully at irrigation systems as a long-term investment. Keep up-to-date forage inventories. Your local feed representative or agricultural agent can help. Consider alternative on-farm related businesses. Diversification can be a good long-term approach to revenue shortfalls from drought. Some ideas: alternative crops, alternative livestock, non-production farm-related ventures such as camping, fee hunting/shooting preserves, farm vacations, bed and breakfast establishments, summer camps on the farm, herd sitting, farm markets or home-based enterprises. Contact your cooperative extension office or your Small Business Development Center for information.

If you're hit hard by a drought consider the following: Discuss financial and feed assistance in the early phase of a drought. Adjust fertilizer rates based on lower yield expectancy. Protect livestock from heat. Call a veterinarian if heat stress is a concern. Cull unprofitable cattle.

Source: University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension.

Water Saving Tips

Here are some water-conservation techniques for your garden: Use correct watering techniques: Water early in the day to reduce evaporation loss. Water less frequently, but for longer lengths of time, to encourage deep root growth. Check hoses for leaks before watering plants, and position sprinklers so they water only plants -- not the road or house. Condition the soil: Adding organic matter to clay and sandy soils will increase the penetrability of clay soils and the water-holding capacity of sandy soils. Mulch the soil surface: This helps cut down on water loss due to evaporation. A two-inch layer of mulch or compost is recommended. Apply mulches to shrubs, trees, annuals, vegetable gardens and even containers. Collect compost for mulching: Use food scraps, yard trimmings, and other organic waste to create a compost pile. Compost is a rich soil amendment that can help increase water retention, decrease erosion and replace chemical fertilizers. Shelter container plants to conserve water: Move containers to areas with partial shade to keep them from drying quickly in hot windy areas. Install a drip or other water-conserving irrigation system: An irrigation system can save up to 60 percent of all water used in garden care. Discourage competition: Eliminate weeds to discourage



competition for water. Consider a landscape fabric between the soil and your mulch to further reduce weeds. Use barrels to collect rainwater: Use it to water plants.

Sources: Maryland Department of the Environment; Environmental Protection Agency

Livestock: Protection and Management

Heat Protection: If animals are kept outside, provide shade during hot weather. Swine may sunburn during hot, sunny weather. Sun shades can cut the radiant heat load and pasture wallows are also effective for sunburn protection. Turn cows outside at night to cool them and cool the barn. Maintain access to water. Provide automatic drinking cups. Keep water containers clean. Adjust the drinking space for the size and number of animals in the pen or group. Check the water delivery systems periodically for plugs or other problems. If necessary, spray water on animals to cool them. Keep an eye on animals; monitor body temperatures. Your county agricultural agent, ventilation specialists or your veterinarian can offer expert advice.

Watering Requirements

Water requirements may increase to double the normal intake for animals during hot weather. Clean, fresh water is important. Your extension office or veterinarian can offer some watering estimates.

Feed Requirements

Farmers unable to afford additional feed may face an emergency situation. Some considerations include:

Develop an inventory of livestock numbers and feed supplies to plan for current and long-term feed needs. Two major options when facing a feed shortage are to:

a) Buy or obtain additional feed. Feed assistance may be available from relief groups, the ASCS or through loans.) Sell non-essential animals. The money received can help buy additional feed for remaining animals. Plant alternative crops for forage.

Source: University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension

How Do I Complete My Census?

You've got your form, but what now?

This year, you can submit your census form online.

Completed forms may also returned by mail using the envelope you received with your form.

Data from the Census will be compiled and reports releases beginning in February 2009.

"More than two million responses have already been received," says Agriculture Secretary Ed Schafer. "I thank those who have ... However, a good number of producers have not been heard from, so I'm encouraging everyone to help make this the most accurate Census of Agriculture on record."

More Information

Visit the Ag Census website or call toll-free 888-424-7828.