



Plan Ahead For This Winter's Feed Needs

By Jackie Nix

Record-breaking drought in many states (see Figure 1) will make feed resources tight this winter. Hay will be in short supply, as will many by-product feed supplements. Now is the time to start planning your winter-feeding program. Adequate nutrition is vital for both the calf and cow in terms of health and productivity. When nutrition suffers, cows lose weight and are harder to breed back in the spring; cows produce less milk and thus weaning weights suffer; and calves are less thrifty. However, on the flip side, it is important to supplement only what is necessary without wasting money in order to remain profitable. The costs associated with winter-feeding can account for over 50% of the total cost of producing weaned calves.

Assessing What Is Needed

The first step will be estimating the amount of hay required to over-winter your cattle. A rough rule of thumb is to estimate that each 1000-lb cow will require about 27 to 30 lbs of hay per day on an as-fed basis assuming little waste (only 10-20 %). Next, estimate the number of days that you will need to feed hay. This will be the hardest part. A normal winter feeding period is about 90 days for many producers; however if the fall remains dry, this feeding period may increase drastically. You will have to access your plans for fall grazing (overseeded small grains, stock-piled fescue, etc.) and formulate a back-up plan in case moisture levels remain low.

Once you've come up with a figure for how much hay is needed, now is the time to inventory the hay you currently have and make arrangements to purchase additional hay if needed. Another good idea would be to have forage analyses performed at this time to assess nutritional value. Drought can profoundly affect the nutritional quality of harvested hay.

How Does Drought Affect Nutrient Quality?

Drought stress negatively affects plant metabolic functions, resulting in low mineral and vitamin levels. Of these, phosphorus and vitamin A are usually most pronounced. Low phosphorus levels negatively affect reproductive function as well as growth. Phosphorus supplementation is critical for breeding and growing animals consuming drought-stressed forages.

Animals normally get carotene (a vitamin A precursor) from grazing green forages. In a normal winter, vitamin A deficiency may not occur because it's stored in the liver. However, during drought conditions, or during extended periods of feeding hay, vitamin A deficiency can become a serious problem without supplementation. Vitamin A deficiency can result in poor conception rates, decreased immunity, reduced growth and poor vision.

Drought-stressed plants also do not metabolize nitrogen into proteins. Consequently drought-stressed plants contain low protein levels. But another negative result is the accumulation of

nitrates. Excessive levels of nitrates (over 1.5%) are toxic to livestock. Plants that are most susceptible to the accumulation of toxic levels of nitrates include: sudangrass, sorghum-sudan hybrids, pearl millet, corn, wheat and oats. Some weeds are also known to accumulate nitrates. These are pigweed, smartweed, ragweed, lambsquarter, goldenrod, nightshades, bindweed, Canada thistle and stinging nettle. Be on the lookout for these weeds in your hay and pastures. The key to avoiding nitrate poisoning is to have all hay forage tested and request the optional test for nitrate levels. Contact your local Cooperative Extension agent for more information about this forage analysis and the dangers of nitrate toxicity.

Supplementation

Because hay resources will be limited, most Alabama cattle producers will be forced to feed below-average quality hay to their cattle. If you have not had your hay tested, it is best to assume that supplementation is needed. If cattle are already in thin body condition, a supplement regime will definitely be necessary in order to put weight back on. **EnProAl[®] Supplements** by **Sweetlix[®]** offer several unique advantages that can help both cattle and cattle producers this winter.

Forage Utilization

With the anticipated low-quality hay this winter, forage utilization and feed efficiency will be more important than ever. Fiber-digesting microbes compete with the microbes that digest starches found in grains. Therefore, overuse of high starch feedstuffs (like corn) will actually decrease forage intake and utilization. Fiber-digesting microbes readily utilize molasses sugars as an energy source though. Molasses sugars found in **EnProAl[®] Supplements** along with added protein, minerals and vitamins enhance populations of fiber-digesting microbes, thus improving forage digestibility.

Consistent Intake

EnProAl[®] molasses-based technology results in supplements with uniform consistency and predictable, consistent consumption rates. Cattle consume EnProAl[®] protein supplements at a known average rate of 1 to 2 pounds per head per day. Predictable consumption rates, means predictable feed costs. This winter it will be more important than ever to keep feed costs manageable. Don't let cheaper "poured tubs" surprise you with high intake rates that inflate your total daily feed costs.

Weatherability

EnProAl[®] molasses-based technology imparts excellent weatherability on all EnProAl[®] Supplement products. As a result, these supplements will not melt or crumble like other supplements. EnProAl[®] Supplements retain excellent palatability even during extreme weather, such as rain, snow or sleet. EnProAl[®] cannot spill or blow away, offering a waste-free supplementation option that saves you money.

Sweetlix[®] offers a wide variety of EnProAl[®] supplement products to allow the greatest amount of flexibility for cattle managers. Here are but a few of the EnProAl[®] supplements by Sweetlix[®] available through your local Sweetlix[®] dealer.

EnProAl[®] 16% Supplement

EnProAl[®] 24% Supplement

EnProAl® 25% Supplement
EnProAl® 24-18-1 Supplement
EnProAl® 10% Plus Mag Supplement

In summary, the drought will result in tight forage supplies this winter. Drought-stressed forages will also result in below-average quality hay. When forage quality is lacking, nutritional supplements are necessary to maintain reproductive and growth performance. Allowing cattle to become too thin hurts profitability. Cattle supplements pay for themselves in added production when used properly. Sweetlix® EnProAl® protein supplements are manufactured with EnProAl® molasses-based technology that imparts many advantages over "poured tubs". For more information about **EnProAl®** protein supplements for cattle and information on how to best fit these into your feeding program, contact **Sweetlix®** at 1-87SWEETLIX or www.sweetlix.com.

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Tips For Stretching Your Feed Dollar

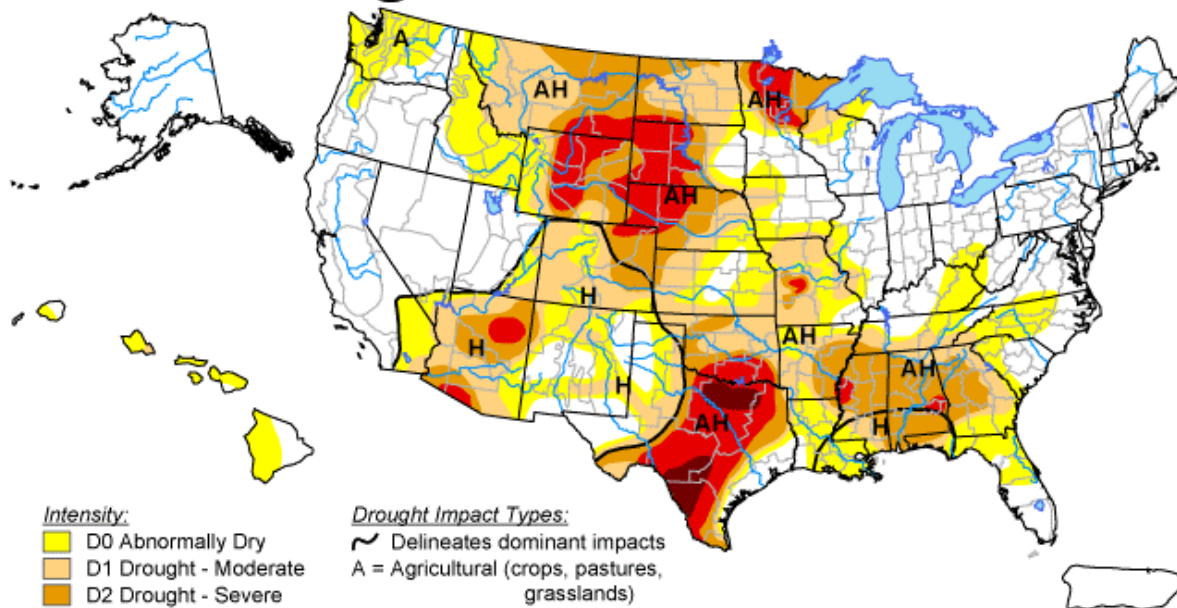
Here are a few tips that can help everyone to stretch their feed budgets.

1. Reduce wasted feed. Use round-bale feeders. Avoid feeding on the ground in wet, sloppy weather to avoid feed being stomped into the ground.
2. Deworm all cattle this fall. Don't let internal parasites reduce feed efficiency and place additional stress on cattle.
3. Cull unproductive animals. Now is the time to cull those marginal animals that you were going to "keep around for just one more year".
4. Always provide a complete mineral/vitamin supplement to deliver recommended levels of phosphorus, copper, selenium and vitamin A, such as **Sweetlix® CopperHead®** mineral supplements. Mineral-deficiency lowers feed conversion efficiency. More efficient feed conversion, allows you to stretch your feed resources farther.

September 2006

U.S. Drought Monitor

September 5, 2006
Valid 8 a.m. EDT



Intensity:

- D0 Abnormally Dry
- D1 Drought - Moderate
- D2 Drought - Severe
- D3 Drought - Extreme
- D4 Drought - Exceptional

Drought Impact Types:

- Delineates dominant impacts
- A = Agricultural (crops, pastures, grasslands)
- H = Hydrological (water)

The Drought Monitor focuses on broad-scale conditions. Local conditions may vary. See accompanying text summary for forecast statements.

<http://drought.unl.edu/dm>



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