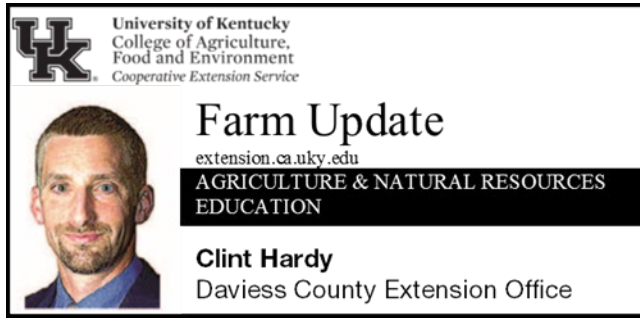


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July 9, 2022

Beef Cattle Management in this Drought

No farms have been without issues related to the lack of moisture and heat this summer. For beef producers, the weather issues arrived earlier than most when half of the normal hay yields were harvested from fields. As summer progressed, pastures stopped growing and many fields have turned brown and completely dried up.

Beware of poisonous plants. Drought and hot weather increase the likelihood of cattle consuming poisonous plants. Several bad plants, like perilla mint, are not normally consumed by cattle but it is possible since these plants grow in the shade where cattle are spending most of their time. Place hay in the areas where cattle congregate so they won't be as tempted to consume any "unusual" plants.

Of course, keep water and shade available. Do not assume that automatic waterers are working; check them frequently. Early weaning of calves might be beneficial to minimize the nutrient needs of spring-calving cows. Calves can be fed to make efficient gains and sold as heavier, weaned calves. Some producers may consider alternative feed options to decrease feed costs. Products such as soybean hulls and the distillery by-product are options to extend limited hay supplies and are a better option than purchasing expensive low-quality hay. Cattle producers

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must keep an eye on their feed stocks for winter feeding. Many people had lower hay yields this spring and feeding now will further decrease hay inventory.

Fortunately, cool-season grasses can endure drought without reducing stand. However, interseeding this fall may be beneficial to help some field areas sustain cattle inventories next summer. Of course, rain is needed in September to establish new plantings. With already low hay inventories being fed for some and certainly in August for most, management practices can be manipulated to extend forages, sell unprofitable animals in a high-price market, and utilize opportunities to maximize profitability in weaned calves.

Besides culling old unprofitable cows, those with bad feet, bad udders, etc., an alternative to extend feed is through early weaning. It is less expensive to feed a calf than a cow, and dry cows eat 20 percent less and require a lower quality diet. After you evaluate your hay supplies, determine if quality alternative feeds should be investigated. Soy hulls are probably the best alternative to hay and while the price is higher, so is the current value of your cattle. Don't pass on opportunities to maintain production. Nursing cows require 15 pounds of soy hulls if fed with 5-7 pounds of hay, while dry cows can get by with 10-12 pounds of soy hulls with the same amount of hay. The largest inconvenience with controlled ration feeding on a daily schedule is the labor required.

It is not recommended to wean calves less than 4 months of age to ensure the calves have an immune system developed to its full potential. You can also consider creep feeding prior to weaning to initiate their conversion from milk and forage to dry feedstuffs and forage. If possible, give their first round of shots prior to weaning and wait until after weaning to make sure they are healthy before implementing other steps which increase quality and performance.

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An important component of early weaning calves is making sure there is plenty of protein in the ration. In addition to free choice hay, a 400-pound calf requires 14 percent protein achieved by 5.5 pounds of soy hulls and 2.8 pounds of corn gluten. A 500-pound calf requires 13.5 percent accomplished by 6 pounds of soy hulls and 2.8 pounds of corn gluten, and a 600-pound calf requires 12 percent protein accomplished by 10 pounds of soy hulls and 1 pound of corn gluten.

Another option for extending hay is grazing corn stalks after harvest. A large percentage of the crop will be harvested in early September, allowing the opportunity to move some dry cows off of pasture for a few weeks. This practice will limit the need to feed hay and allow pastures to rest, extending hay supplies.

Daviess County Fair

Consider participating in the Daviess County Lions Club Fair. Entries for youth and adult open classes and 4-H categories can be found in the fair book available at the Extension Office or online at <https://daviess.ca.uky.edu/fair>. Entries drop-off at the Exhibit Building is Tuesday, July 19, 4:00-6:00 p.m. at the fairgrounds in Philpot. Ribbons and award money can be picked up Sunday, July 24, 2:00-4:00 p.m.

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