



Grazier

► by Kindra Gordon

Council created to monitor drought

Despite some timely spring rains in the drought-stricken Plains and Western states, the precipitation has not been enough to replenish range and pasture forages for livestock grazing, creating a feed shortage for many livestock producers.

"The drought is not over," says Karen Batra, with the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA). "It's continuing to be a problem, especially in Colorado and Wyoming, where it's really, really dry."

Washington hears concern

Fortunately, concerns about the drought have not gone unnoticed in Washington, D.C., and the administration is taking a proactive stance toward another potentially dry growing season. In mid-April, Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman announced that a Drought Coordinating Council is being formed to monitor drought conditions. Veneman also announced that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will offer surplus nonfat dried milk (NDM) to drought-affected livestock producers for use as an emergency supplemental feed for cattle, buffalo, sheep and goats.

"One of our most pressing concerns right now is the ability of pasture and grazing lands to support livestock herds," Veneman said. "Nonfat dry milk can serve as a high-quality source of protein to maintain foundation livestock herds in this critical time."

Through the 2003 Livestock Feed Program, the USDA has already committed 218 million pounds (lb.) of NDM for livestock producers to use as a protein supplement with grain. States with counties eligible for this first round of feed assistance include: Arizona, Colorado, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, South Dakota, Utah and Wyoming. (Specific counties are listed at www.fsa.usda.gov/daco/NDMSales/NDMDroughtSales.pdf.)

It's likely that more NDM emergency feed could be made available to additional counties if drought conditions continue through the summer. The U.S. Drought Monitor will be used to reevaluate eligible counties every 30 days to ensure the program is targeting producers who have the greatest need. USDA chief economist Keith Collins said, "This new feed program could continue. We're doing this in 30-day windows."

How to utilize NDM

At 36% crude protein (CP) and 93% total digestible nutrients (TDN), NDM is a highly degradable protein and energy source, says Dale Zobell, a Utah State University Extension beef specialist. He recommends these guidelines for its use:

- ▶ NDM should not be fed free-choice. It is recommended that it be mixed with other available feedstuffs or used in cubes, cake, pellets or tubs.
- ▶ Incorporating NDM into pellets or cubes can make them very hard — even at rates as low as 20%. Thus, feed manufacturers may need to experiment to identify a ration acceptable for their situation. Inclusion of the NDM at 10% is a recommended starting point.
- ▶ Cattle should not be fed more than 2 lb. of NDM per head per day.
- ▶ To garner the most benefit from NDM, range and pasture management specialists advise that it be fed in a drylot setting so cattle are kept off pastures and forage plants are given more time to recover.

South Dakota State University (SDSU) Extension range livestock production

A win-win program

The emergency feed program's use of surplus dry milk is being deemed a win-win program. Not only does it provide an additional feed resource for drought-strapped livestock producers, but it is also helping deplete one-fifth of the 1.1 billion pounds (lb.) of powdered milk the government has in storage across the country. The milk was bought over the past three years to prop up prices paid to dairy farmers.

specialist Barry Dunn says studies indicate that keeping grazing pressure off pastures in the year of recovery from drought is crucial in helping grasslands recover sooner.

How to enroll

Livestock producers in counties deemed eligible for NDM feed supplies can get information about the program through their county Extension office or Farm Service Agency (FSA) office.

The current emergency feed assistance is different from last year's program because there will not be a voucher system for distributing the supplemental feed. Instead, the USDA has developed a Memorandum of Understanding with each of the drought states with eligible counties that allows states to distribute the NDM accordingly.

Cattle producers in eligible counties may request up to a 30-day supply of NDM based on a maximum amount of 2 lb. per head per day. At the time of enrollment, producers can select from a list of distribution centers to which the NDM may be shipped. The NDM will be shipped in 55-lb. double-walled plastic-lined bags.

Eligible producers also have the option to barter all or part of their NDM allocation in exchange for other feed products. However, producers must make arrangements with and obtain an authorized signature from a participating feed manufacturer prior to enrolling in the program if they choose to do this, officials say.

To keep abreast of changes to this program and eligible counties through the summer, visit <http://disaster.fsa.usda.gov/ndm.htm>.

More resources available

In addition to the livestock feed assistance program, the USDA has several other programs in the works that are aimed at assisting producers and communities affected by drought.

Veneman's new Drought Coordinating Council will also monitor the impact the drought has on agriculture producers. Once in place, the Council will work to educate producers about drought preparedness and to help ensure the timely distribution of resources to assist producers, businesses and communities affected by drought, according to Veneman.

The Drought Coordinating Council will bring together resources from the FSA, the Risk Management Agency (RMA), the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the USDA Forest Service (FS), the Agricultural Research Service (ARS), the Cooperative State Research Extension and Education Service, the National Ag Statistics Service (NASS), the Animal and Plant

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Health Inspection Service (APHIS), the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), and agencies under Rural Development.

This new council is also expected to work with the Department of the Interior to coordinate wildfire prevention and suppression efforts.

Under the Agricultural Assistance Act of 2003, which was signed into law in late February, the USDA will also offer the newly created Livestock Assistance Program (LAP)

beginning in July. This program will make \$250 million available to reimburse producers for grazing losses that were not covered under the previous Livestock Compensation Program (LCP). Eligible producers will have a choice of receiving payments for losses suffered in either 2001 or 2002.

The FSA also operates HayNet, www.fsa.usda.gov/haynet/, that serves as an electronic bulletin board where ranchers in

critical need of hay can find information about the nearest supply.

For information on these or other USDA programs, visit your local FSA office or see www.usda.gov. For more information on the drought and how it is affecting your area, visit www.angusjournal.com/drought for links to drought sites across the United States.

