

Drought strategies for local farmers

If you are a cattle producer, you have either already weaned your cattle, or are in preparation. Drought forces cattlemen to change practices in order to save their herd and livelihood. Early weaning, when done correctly, can be an effective drought management tool which benefits pasture recovery, cattle productivity and the calf crop.

Vet tips
Dr. Aaron White



A cow's goal in life is to produce a healthy plentiful calf crop. If the cow is unproductive, she is not profitable. For a cow to be productive she needs to be pregnant and/or nursing a calf for much of her life. All of this takes energy. In drought years energy sources are especially sparse, so efficiency is critical. For the cow, early weaning reduces lactation demands which lowers nutrient requirements. First-calf heifers are still growing, so early weaning not only reduces lactation demands, but allows the nutrients to be used to finish the heifer's growth and development. The unborn calves should be as much of a concern as the nursing calves. Drought causes stress. Stress in the pregnant cows will result in light, weak calves at birth and reduced colostrum quality and quantity. In severe drought, early weaning may be essential in allowing cattle to regain body condition. The brood cow must be in sufficient condition to winter well on low quality roughages, especially in drought years. This is vital in maintaining healthy cattle which will aid in producing a healthier calf the next year and subsequent rebreeding season. If a cow is in poor condition at breeding time, the result is a lower percent of the cows coming into heat, an increased postpartum interval, a lower conception rate, and more open cows during pregnancy exam.

The most important issue to be addressed is how to manage calves during early weaning. Facilities and feeds are critical and dependent on the age and weight of the weaned calves. Calves must be able to have reliable access to feed and water. A low-stress weaning program will go a long way in setting calves up for a healthy start and begin to gain on appropriate rations.

Even if you did not early wean this year, it is not too late to think about next year. If cows are behind in nutrition this Fall and finish the winter in poor condition, early weaning may be just what is needed to help the cows recover. Early weaning can enhance the efficiency of drylot cow-calf operations by allowing greater use of poor quality roughages by the cow herd. Early weaning will also give the pastures a longer window of recovery.

In situations when under-feeding is common, a more intensive and costly health program may result. It pays to process calves ahead of weaning. Processing is a stressful event for the calves. Stress will undermine exactly what needs to be done, boost the immune system to prevent disease. Disease will result in decreased gain and increased costs. Vaccination programs are essential in keeping these calves healthy. Vaccination programs will be very dependent on how and when the calves are weaned, so always discuss this with your veterinarian.



Nice cool weather and family visits

Whoever heard of running the furnace in July?

But that's exactly what I woke up to Sunday morning. The chill in the air had awakened Jim and after shutting our bedroom door to the balcony, he had headed downstairs. I found him bundled up in a blanket, wearing heavy wool socks with the furnace cranked up to 75. His teeth were practically chattering and he swore he was freezing while I was perfectly comfortable going barefooted wearing light cotton pajamas. We can never seem to get our internal thermostats balanced so we are both comfortable.

All complaining aside, though, the moisture in the air has been a welcome relief. Light rain has fallen for the better part of two days. Sometimes it was fog as thick as pea soup; sometimes it was a dewy mist. Whatever it was, it was wet. Hasn't measured much in the rain gauge, but we'll take whatever we can

Out Back
Carolyn Plotts



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Plans, at this moment, are for our two girls in Dallas, Halley and Kara, 14-year old granddaughter, Taylor and a niece, Pam, from Little Rock to all come for the fair. Add in Dick and Donna's boys, Kirk and Sheldon, plus Brian, who lives here now, possibly, Mark and they're going to make it a mini-Kelley Cousins Reunion.

With that in mind, I batted my eyes at Jim and coyly asked if there was any way he could pretty-please do just a couple of itty-bitty little jobs for me.

It worked, because he agreed without even asking what the jobs were.

I want to get the last guest bedroom finished. We had always thought we would "bump out" the walls and make dormers on both side, but we finally came to our senses and decided to leave the steeply sloped ceilings. The drywall seams have never been filled and I would really like to have that done, (so I can paint the room), a ceiling fan hung, the window trimmed and cornice boxes made for the one lounge and two bedroom windows. There will be other things, but those were my main "wants".

Imagine how excited I was to see Jim carrying in, not one, not two, but all three cornice boxes. Custom made to fit each window. One is already padded and covered with an iridescent green silky fabric I've been saving just for this occasion. The curtains are almost done and I couldn't be happier.

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Farm safety around electrical power lines

In June of this year, a 37-year-old Stanton County farmer died inside a grain cart while preparing for wheat harvest. A tarp (containing a metal rod) in the grain cart blew up and touched an over-head power line electrocuting him.

Without a doubt this falls in the category of a freak accident. There's probably no way this young farmer would have thought a strong gust of wind would whip the tarp up into an overhead power line and kill him. Still, friends and neighbors in his community say they were extremely aware of where they parked trucks, tractors and other farm machinery after this tragedy.

Since 1980, 26 Kansas farmers and stockmen have died by electrocution. Most of these deaths resulted in contact with overhead power lines on the farm.

No-one likes to think or talk about the dangers of electricity and the consequences. Still, it's important to be aware of potential hazards - especially in agriculture.

"Many farms in Kansas have power lines strung on poles crossing farm land and in some cases buried under ground; it's important to be aware of electrical facts and principles and observe safety precautions," says Holly Higgins, Kansas Farm Bureau safety director.

Higgins suggests farmers, ranchers and anyone who works around electric power lines consider and always keep the following facts in the back of their mind.

Most overhead power lines have no

Insight
John Schlageck



protective insulation. Any physical or equipment contact with them could be dangerous or lethal.

Non-metallic materials such as lumber, tree limbs, tires, ropes, straw and hay can conduct electricity depending on moisture content and surface contamination.

Electricity always seeks the easiest and shortest path to the ground.

Persons can be electrocuted by simply coming too close to a power line. Electricity can arc or jump between a wire and a conducting object such as a ladder or truck.

Always stay a safe distance away from power lines - 10 feet or more, especially for high-voltage lines.

When people or objects touch or come to close to a power line, there is an instant flow of electricity through them to the ground.

The flow of electricity through the human body can burn, severely injure or cause death. It takes less than one ampere of electricity to kill a person.

When electricity flows into the ground, it can electrocute anyone who comes close. Stay at least 30 feet or more away from fallen wires. Also, if you see equipment or a person in

contact with a power line, be aware that the ground may be electrified and be dangerous to bystanders.

"It's important we learn from others' mistakes," Higgins says. "Always think before you act and remain vigilant about your surroundings and possible safety hazards."

Think before you move farm machinery, hoppers, bins, sprayer booms, cultivator wings, grain augers, bale elevators, scaffolds and portable buildings around or under power lines.

Look before you raise or carry ladders, poles, rods, irrigation pipes or eaves troughs near power lines.

Check clearance before you raise dump truck boxes or front-end loaders.

Never touch power lines with tools or lift power lines by hand or with lumber.

Never clear storm-damaged trees, limbs or other debris that are touching or are close to fallen power lines.

Avoid cutting trees or pruning limbs that may fall on power lines. Hire a specialist to take care of such hazardous projects.

Never try to move fallen electrical wires. Never leave a vehicle when you are within 30 feet of fallen wires.

Educate children, young and seasonal workers about power line hazards, Higgins advises. Point out where they're located and remind workers about the importance of keeping a safe distance especially if they will be operating equipment or handling long objects.