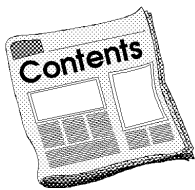


SISKIYOU STOCKMAN

What's New in the "Top of the State". A report for Siskiyou Livestock Producers put out by the Farm Advisors Office, Cooperative Extension of the University of California, located at 1655 South Main Street, Yreka, California 96097

May 2001



In This Issue

- Management Alternatives During Drought
- Drought, Disaster and Relief
- Optimum Ribeye Size

Calendar

- Aug 8 - 12 Siskiyou Golden Fair,
Yreka
- Aug ?? Annual Cattle Tour,
Scott Valley
- Sept 5 - 9 Tulelake-Butte Valley Fair,
Tulelake

Management Alternatives During Drought

The year is shaping up as historically low moisture and potential for extremely reduced feed conditions. Even yellow starthistle is not doing well. The traditional response for livestock producers is additional land or selling of livestock to reduce feed requirements. Those actions and others are possible management decisions for dealing with the potential for severely reduced feed conditions.

Acquiring additional land through leasing is difficult due to scarcity and higher cost. Small grazing acreage may be more available than larger tracts of land, but usually has higher labor costs, transportation and often inadequate fences.

Typically, older less productive cows are sold to reduce feed requirements, but sometimes even younger cows must be sold. Selling livestock under disaster conditions may have tax implications and a tax advisor may be consulted.

Another way to reduce forage needs is to lower animal feed requirements. Since lactation is the highest nutritional demand for cows, weaning earlier than usual will effectively lower forage needs. Earlier weaning provides substantial reduction in feed requirements and minimal reductions in calf sale weight. Dry weaned cows will consume much less feed and get by on much lower quality feed. Feed reductions for cows of 30 to 45 percent less have been reported. In an Ohio study, the total digestible nutrients (TDN) of the cow and early weaned calf pair (weaned at 110 days) was 20 percent less than pairs weaned at 222 days. In this study, early weaned calves weighed 57 pounds more than the normal weaned

calves at weaning for the normal weaned pairs. (Remember they consumed 20 percent fewer total digestible nutrients.) Fall-calving cows and calves could be weaned in April, May or June. Some producers routinely wean the larger end of their fall calves in May. During restricted forage conditions almost all fall calves would be old enough for weaning in early spring. When early weaned, fall-calving cows could subsist on low quality feed during most of the summer. In severe deficiencies, the early weaned fall-calving cows could be culled. Spring calving cows and calves could be weaned in mid-summer. Calves 5 months or older are usually easily weaned "early". Castrate, dehorning and branding is done before weaning.

Early weaning does not have to include the entire herd. First or second calf heifers are difficult to re-breed and scarce feed conditions will only exacerbate the situation. They would be good candidates for early weaning.

Weaning calves onto poor quality feed is going to lead to poor gains. Recognize limited feed conditions early, wean before conditions have deteriorated so the weaned calves have quality pasture. The dry cows can "tough" it out on droughty feed.

Dry, weaned cows are suitable for smaller units of leased land which may be available. There are fewer concerns about theft, and adequate fences for dry cows compared to pairs. Your early weaned calves would stay home on your pastures.

Quality irrigated pasture can be effectively used directly by the weaned calf. Each acre will carry many more calves than pairs. Calves as light as 350 pounds or 3 months of age can be weaned at that time, without significant labor increases or risk of poor calf health. A few extra pre-cautions are helpful.

Producers may want to consider fenceline weaning when implementing early weaning.

weaned calves. Feed costs were also lower for the early weaned calves. Research conducted in California and presented at the Annual Grower's Seminar in Yreka showed calves weaned across a fenceline lost less weight, started eating grass sooner, ate more and weighed more after weaning than traditionally weaned calves. Fenceline weaning has been accomplished with woven wire fence and barbed wire supplemented with a single strand of electric wire. While it would seem like a lot of livestock pressure would be applied to the fence, perhaps this process encourages the calves to spend more time grazing and less pressing on the fence.

Increasing the intensity of grazing management can have big returns for small investments. Pasture often receives minimal management especially grazing management and increased management of grazing could provide large benefits. Producers have found big increases by managing grazing more carefully. The basic principals involve managing livestock to completely and quickly harvest forage at the desired stage and then allowing adequate rest and re-growth for the cycle to begin anew. This might be envisioned as using cattle as swathers for harvesting pasture. The manager decides when the plant is harvested, all the plants are harvested and another cutting is initiated when the manager decides. This is accomplished with cattle instead of a swather.

A generic system that has worked well under Siskiyou County conditions is sufficient cattle to harvest an area or paddock in no more than 3 days. The cattle are then moved to another area and the grazed area rested for about 25 days. After the paddock rests, it is harvested again. This requires about 8 or 9 areas or paddocks to continuously move through. While the labor of moving the cattle sounds extreme and it is regular, the cattle learn the system quickly and a large number can be moved quickly. Most producers find the trade off of more labor spent moving cattle far outweighed by increased use of the pasture. It takes just about as long to move a large group of cattle as one much

smaller, so larger groups are somewhat more labor efficient.

Improvements due to increased grazing management as described above vary but typically growers report 50 to 100 percent increases in carrying capacity. Pastures that carried 1 pair per acre all summer, which is about average, would increase and carry about 1 1/2 pairs per acre. Increasing carrying capacity of pastures could free up some forage for hay production.

Combining early weaning with increased grazing management can result in dramatic increases in carrying capacity. If we assume a weaned calf is about 3/4 of an animal unit, then potentially, the pasture could go from supporting 1 pair to 2 to 2 1/4 weaned calves per acre, by employing both weaning and intensive grazing management.

Supplements can extend grazed forage. The caveat with supplements is to use them to augment forages not replace them. The goal is a small intake of supplement. These are often as liquids or blocks (tubs), but could include hay as a supplement to the pasture. Generally when the supplement exceeds 3 pounds of intake daily, the supplement begins to replace forage. As a replacement for grazed forage, supplement is too expensive.

Composition of supplements varies widely. The source of protein in the supplement is typically either a natural protein source or a non-protein nitrogen source such as urea. With diets that need supplementation, that is low energy poorer quality diets, non-protein nitrogen as a source of protein is usually poorly utilized. Natural protein sources are better utilized on low quality diets.

If reduced feed conditions lead to increased crowding and short grass, increased preventative health may be helpful. Increased deworming, fly control and vaccinations will help reduce ill-health due to more crowded conditions. Healthy

animals will utilize their feed nutrients more efficiently. Crowded conditions and scarce feed also contributes to consumption of poisonous plants that usually are avoided. If you can remember stories of certain pastures with poisonous plants, those fields are potential problems during drought. Drought can also increase nitrate levels. Nitrates are more of a problem with certain plants such as pigweed, lambsquarter, and sudan. High nitrogen fertilizer rates, especially with drought, increase nitrate levels. Nitrates are more highly concentrated in the lower portion of plants, so close grazing places cattle at greater jeopardy. Remember that young plants, frost, drought and generally low temperature are other contributors to high nitrates. After these stressful events nitrate levels will be highest, subsiding over a period of a few days of better growing conditions.

Drought, Disaster and Relief

Potentially several government programs will be available to producers due to drought related losses. Due to changing conditions and programs, and difficulties planning under those conditions, producers may best manage without consideration of government programs. Just do what makes the most sense from a production viewpoint, and see how that fits into government programs when those programs are finalized. Final details for all of the programs certainly will not be available before the decisions are made. Contact the Farm Services Agency at 842-6123 for updated information.

Optimum Ribeye Size

The foodservice industry desires steaks that are of uniform size, consistent and a high quality eating experience with reasonable cooking time. Steakhouse restaurants during the 1990s have experienced a large growth and consumers are eating out more often, spending 50 percent of their food dollar for meals outside the household. Colorado State workers evaluated low Choice steaks from ribeyes varying from less than 11 to more than 16 square inches to determine the optimal range of ribeye size for

the foodservice industry. They found steaks from larger ribeyes were more tender, thinner (to maintain the same portion weight as smaller area ribeyes), and required less time to cook. Their conclusions were ribeye areas between 12 and 15 inches were most appropriate considering both cooking time and tenderness. This resulted in steaks about 0.9 to 1.0 inches thick and 12 to 16 minutes for medium rare cooking.

Source: Dunn et al, 2000, J. An. Science 78: 966.

This is your copy of the Siskiyou Stockman which you requested or which we thought would be of interest to you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Daniel J. Drake". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Daniel J. Drake, Ph.D., PAS
Farm Advisor - Livestock & Range
530/842-2711

Commercial companies are mentioned in this publication solely for the purpose of providing specific information. Mention of a company does not constitute a guarantee or warranty of its products or an endorsement over products of other companies not mentioned.

The University of California, in compliance with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, does not discriminate on the basis of race, creed, religion, color, natural origin, sex or mental or physical handicap in any of its programs or activities, or with respect to any of its employment policies, practices or procedures. The University of California does not discriminate on the basis of age, ancestry, sexual orientation, marital status, citizenship, medical condition (as defined in section 12926 of the California Government Code), nor because individuals are disabled or Vietnam era veterans. Inquiries regarding this policy may be directed to the Director, Office of Affirmative Action, Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources, 300 Lakeside Drive, Oakland, California 94612-3550, (510)987-0097.