

# *Hardee Rancher Beef and Forage Newsletter*



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**April 2007**

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## *Calendar Of Events*

### **May**

2-4	Gainesville - Beef Cattle Short Course
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### **June**

19-22	Marco Island - Florida Cattlemen's Annual Convention
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27-28	Hardee County Extension Office - Forage Workers Tour
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### **August**

11	Hardee County Extension Office - Small Farms Forage and Pasture School
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# September

5-6

Desoto County Extension Office - Advanced Grazing and Pasture Renovation School

Ona Weather Monthly Summary: <http://fawn.ifas.ufl.edu>

January, 2007 - 1.45 inches rainfall

February, 2007 - 2.02 inches rainfall

March, 2007 - 0.63 inches rainfall

## - Drought Management Strategies for Beef Cattle -

Lochrane A. Gary/Hardee County Extension Director

Recent rainfall has helped alleviate the prolonged drought experienced this winter in Hardee county but we may not get much more moisture until late June or July. The following are suggestions to consider during a period of low rainfall. Cattlemen need to manage forage production during these difficult times to remain profitable. For the most part, no single strategy will save a distressed operation but a combination of strategies which follow may turn a bad situation around. Each rancher must evaluate the situation and determine his/her options.

**Forage Type.** We are prone to drought during the winter and early spring. Cool season grasses and legumes will stop growing after a few weeks of dry, hot weather. This winter has been especially poor for ryegrass production as well as clovers. Overgrazing during droughts may result in stand loss. Warm season forage grasses will grow slowly during dry weather. However, they are not as susceptible to drought as cool season forages. The warm season grasses are quick to recover once rainfall begins. This is especially true of bahiagrass as the nights become warmer and we experience greater amounts of photoperiod.

**Creep Feeding.** One of the most profitable times to creep feed is during an extended drought. Grain and protein prices need to be carefully considered in light of calf prices .

**Early Weaning.** The nutritional requirements of cows is drastically reduced when the calves are weaned. Early weaning will allow the calves to be fed high quality forage while the cows are maintained on low quality hay or deferred pastures. Steer calves may be sold early and often bring as much income as calves weighing more.

**Supplemental Feeding.** If the cow herd is losing body condition due to a prolonged drought and pastures are grazed down, supplemental hay will need to be provided. Those who have a 30-60 day supply of feed beyond the normal requirements will be in better shape than those who have not planned for such an emergency.

**Herd Reduction.** When feed is scarce, one solution is to eliminate the “free boarders” in the herd. Palpate the cow herd and cull open and older cows with bad udders and broken mouths, etc. This leaves the available feed for the replacement heifers and younger cows.

**Retained Ownership.** If the calves are large enough, retaining ownership through the feedlot phase may be an option.

**Reevaluate Stocking Rate.** This may be an excellent time to reconsider your stocking rate. If the forage is depleted rapidly every time there is a dry spell, the ranch is overstocked. If there is plenty of low quality forage available after a drought then the ranch is under stocked. The stocking rate of a south Florida ranch is best evaluated and considered during February and March, not during July and August when there is an overabundance of forage.

**Alternative Fees.** When forage is not available, producers may wish to consider alternative feeds. Citrus and bakery by-products, grain, grain by-products, soy hulls, cottonseed and wheat midds are all excellent ways of extending the pasture and hay supply. One must consider the cost of energy and protein sources which are available. Feeding high grain rations can work but be certain to feed at least four pounds of hay per day in order to maintain normal rumen function.

**Poisonous Plants.** Plant poisonings are most common during droughts or periods of overgrazing. Check your pastures for poisonous plants such as crotalaria, ferns, nightshade, oleander, sicklepod, lantana and horse nettle which stay green in drought conditions and which have toxic properties. Plants which have cyanide potential include black cherry, cherry laurel, Johnson grass, sorghum and sudan grass. Plants which are considered toxic ornamentals include azaleas, mountain laurel, castor bean, lantana, Japanese yew and rhododendrons.

**Nitrate Poisonings.** Drought and plant stresses are associated with increased nitrate levels in plants. Prevention is best achieved by controlling the type and quality of the forage offered. When in doubt, have it analyzed before feeding. Nitrate poisoning is most serious after it rains. Since nitrate levels are concentrated in the lower stalk, when it rains the nitrate is transported throughout the plant. Keep animals off these areas for at least one to two weeks after it rains. Nitrate potentials: Amaranthus, Grasses, Millet, Oats/wheat, Ryegrass, Sorghum, Sudan grass, corn and others.

**Protect from heat.** When the sun is high in the sky, and the temperature and humidity begins to rise, keep a close eye on your cattle. Temperatures 80 and warmer, coupled with high humidity and sun light radiation cause problems. Adequate shade or access to wooded areas is needed for protection from the sun. Provide ample, cool, clean drinking water, and, if necessary, spray water on the animal to cool them.

**Aflatoxin** causes considerable problems for beef cattle. High aflatoxin levels reduce growth rates. Calves are generally more susceptible than cows. In severe cases, aflatoxin poisoning can cause liver damage and depress the immune function. When in doubt, have grains analyzed before feeding.

**Parasite control.** Internal and external parasite control will reduce the stress and nutritional needs of the animal. Treated now will also reduce the stress in the fall.

**Tax issues and drought.** Droughts can wreck havoc. The good news is that come income tax time, you have some options that might make things easier. If you were forced to sell livestock because of the drought, you can possibly postpone reporting gains on the sale for as long as two years. Consult your tax accountant.

## - Fed-cattle Prices Top \$100 -

The Texas Cattle Feeders Association reports that live cattle prices reached \$100 per hundredweight in active trading last week. "This week's large trade volume should put the industry in excellent shape going into next week," TCFA market director Jim Gill said on Friday. "With the expected increase in demand associated with the start of grilling season, the next few weeks should be very interesting in the cattle market." So far this week, wholesale beef prices have posted significant gains with Tuesday's average for Choice boxed beef reaching \$166.99 per hundredweight, more than \$7 over last Friday's average. As of Tuesday, USDA reports

little trade in the fed-cattle market, with steer prices at \$101. Rising cattle prices and recent declines in grain prices have helped cattle feeding margins significantly the past two weeks. The strength in the fed-cattle market also has provided more support to a stocker/feeder market that is experiencing a significant spring rally. According to Drovers' nationwide 50-market auction summary, average prices for yearling steers weighing 700 to 800 pounds have increased nearly \$10 per hundredweight since the end of January. **Greg Henderson, Drovers editor**

## - Bacteria Control now Available for Use on Live Animals -

USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service has issued a no-objection letter for use of Salmonella-targeted bacteriophage, manufactured by OmniLytics Inc., applied as a mist, spray or wash on live animals prior to slaughter. The BacWash TM branded bacteriophage products will be utilized to reduce the level of Salmonella contamination on the hides of livestock prior to further processing. The company also envisions that bacteriophage will be used to treat holding areas, transportation vehicles, containers and living quarters. For more information about OmniLytics, visit [www.omnilytics.com](http://www.omnilytics.com).

## - Live Liver-fluke Roundtable to Air on RFD-TV -

Tune to RFD-TV Live on Monday, April 23, 2007, at 8 p.m. EDT, for a special one-hour broadcast featuring a panel of industry experts gathered to discuss the spread of liver flukes, the risk flukes pose and the impact on the industry. Experts will share diverse experiences and offer producers tips on how to minimize the risk. For more details, go to [www.drovers.com](http://www.drovers.com).

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For questions or comments regarding this publication contact



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