

Drought Management: Feeding strategies when grazing and hay is running out

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Most of Georgia, and especially parts of North Georgia, have suffered through some level of drought this summer. The extended drought in many parts of the state have a double whammy effect on producers because not only do they not have pastures to graze this summer, but they also will not be able to harvest enough hay to get through the winter. Hopefully, by the time you read this, you've received plenty of rain and drought isn't an issue, but for many, this will not be the case. Drought has not been a stranger over the past few years, in fact, I wrote a similar article four years ago. However, with the ebbs and flows of the cattle industry, there are still some management plans to consider to minimize the effects of drought on the farm's finances. It is important to maintain the nutrient requirements of the herd through a drought so that animal performance is not compromised in the current and upcoming seasons.

What if hay is not available? The key is to develop a ration that meets the nutrient requirements of the cows.

- The stage of production of your herd is critical to knowing exactly what to feed. Table 1 lists some example rations to use for different stages of production. More examples of hay replacement rations for cows and calves are available in the Hay Replacement bulletin.
- Consider early weaning to reduce the nutrient requirements of the brood cows.
- Utilize a roughage source such as wheat straw, cottonseed hulls, crop residue, grazing drought stressed crops, gin trash.
- Examples of energy and/or byproduct feed include: grains such as corn, oats, etc., soybean hulls, citrus pulp, wheat midds, hominy.
- Examples of protein feed include: soybean meal, cottonseed meal, corn gluten feed, dried distillers grains, whole cottonseed.

Is buying hay the economic choice?

- ALWAYS, ALWAYS, ALWAYS ask for a forage analysis and/or test the hay before purchasing. If not, you may be paying a premium for something that will not meet the requirements of your cows.
- Take into consideration the cost of the supplement AND hay.
- Also, take into consideration the method of feeding hay. If hay is not fed in a ring or other way to minimize loss, hay losses can be as high as 30%, or more.
- Table 2 compares the cost of buying hay versus feeding a hay replacement diet
- Note that if hay is being wasted, it is more economical to buy a replacement ration. This is point is not necessarily to steer you towards the feed, more so, to show the value of proper handling of purchased hay

Utilizing these strategies may help maintain performance through drought conditions. Additional resources are available at the Drought Management section of ugabeef.com. If you have additional questions regarding feeding strategies during a drought, please contact your local Extension office (1-800-ASK-UGA-1).

Table 1. Hay replacement rations

Ingredient	Dry Cow	Early Lactation	Late Lactation or Late Gestation
	----- % of ration -----		
Fair Hay (48 TDN, 7% CP)	60	30	45
Energy and/or byproduct feed	40	45	45
Protein Source	--	25	10

Table 2. Hay replacement ration and comparison to feeding hay.

Ingredient	\$/ton	Hay, % of intake	Hay Replacement Ration, % of intake
Fair Hay (48% TDN, 7% CP)	\$100	100%	
Gin Trash	\$65		60%
Soybean Hulls	\$180		20%
Corn Gluten Feed	\$185		20%
Daily Intake, lbs		25 lb	25 lb
Cost/cow			
0% hay wasted		\$1.25/hd	\$1.39
10%		\$1.39/hd	
20%		\$1.56/hd	
30%		\$1.79/hd	



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