



Advice on responding to drought

Introduction

Local Land Services recognises that drought is an intrinsic part of our landscape. Good management planning can help reduce the impacts. This fact sheet outlines some of the key considerations when responding to drought conditions on farm.

1. ASSESS your pastures and crops

Inspect all of your paddocks. Work out how much feed you have. What is the quality of the feed? If it stays dry for the next month, two months, three months, what will the quality and quantity be like? How much feed do you need for the stock you are carrying? What stage are your crops at? Will they finish or can they be grazed?

Develop a feed budget. What is the groundcover percentage – are there bare patches showing? Groundcover is easily assessed and is a useful tool. High levels of groundcover ensure rainfall that falls is slowed down and better captured, with more rain infiltrating the soil profile. If there are reasonable levels of leaf cover remaining, the pasture will recover much faster when rain does fall.

2. CHECK your soil moisture profiles

While you are checking pastures, dig a few holes and assess soil moisture levels. Is there still moisture in the root zone? Match what you find here to the weather forecasts and to the feed you need in the months ahead.

3. ASSESS livestock condition

Check the condition score of your livestock. If you have lactating animals, consider early weaning to reduce the energy demand on breeding stock. Young heifers, ewes and breeders should be watched closely as they are prone to stripping condition which can result in poor re-joining rates. For example heifers with their first calf should not fall below Fat score 2 (minimum 3mm fat at P8 site).

Calves, 2-5 months-old, will wean satisfactorily provided they are supplied with a high quality supplementary diet.

It is more efficient to wean calves early and feed them separately than trying to supplement the lactating cow/calf unit. This applies for sheep and other classes of livestock.

4. ASSESS your stock water status

How much water do you have stored on farm? How many litres a day will your stock drink? What is the quality of your stored water? Could stock accessing water get stuck in mud? Can you improve water access and availability overall should it remain dry? Utilise feed in paddocks with poor water supplies first.

5. CONSIDER your supplementary feed options

Do a stocktake on your supplementary feed. How much do you have? What is its quality? Will it maintain stock & if so, how many? Can it fatten and finish stock? Energy should be the main focus of supplementary feeding. Then give consideration to protein, fibre and the vitamin/ mineral components. Do your sums as feed and transport costs vary widely. For example: Cereal grain (energy source) prices delivered on-farm may vary by over \$50 per tonne and then complete mixes from local feed mills while simpler to feed, can attract further premiums. Remember, grain quality can vary and grain prices can rise quickly as supply tightens. Check with your supplier.

Hay & silage can be sourced from other areas which have not had the same conditions and continue to have an adequate supply of pasture, and conditions will normally dictate the price. The main word of caution is to seek out a feed quality test to determine value for money.

Do not forget to obtain a commodity vendor declaration with any stock feed purchased, and when purchasing feed in bulk, give consideration to available resources to unload and/ or store.



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6. PLAN and PRIORITISE a livestock selling order

Work out a selling order for your stock taking current market conditions into consideration. If lack of feed is likely to be an immediate issue, strongly consider selling any fat or finished stock to ease feed and water demand on the farm.

Pregnancy testing breeders is good drought management. Culling empties should be a first priority. Calculate whether it's worth selling livestock classes at current weights and prices, or to supplement and feed on to target a specific market. Keeping in mind livestock prices may fall for drought affected stock and feed prices may rise if dry seasonal conditions persist.

Those with growing stock, experiencing deteriorating feed quality and quantity, should consider selling anything marketable.

Also consider an order of sale at certain trigger points before the season 'forces' a sale, often at a time when many others are in the same situation.

7. KNOW your financial position

Inform yourself and/or your management team on your cash position and your farm equity. Run some partial budgets at least to determine likely outcomes of holding and feeding stock vs selling in the current market. Remember Rural Financial Counselors, your Accountant or Farm Consultant can assist with budgeting and finance requirements. Financial support or household payments may also be available in your area so ask questions and seek planning advice.

Final thought

Everyone's situation is unique and producers need to make decisions tailored to their situation and production system.

It is important to gather all the information you can, assessing your property, livestock and water; considering feed and management options; consulting family, workers, agents or advisors; and then forming an action plan and decision making process to actively manage your property through drought.

Managing your property through drought is an important way to better understand its constraints and opportunities.

The NSW Department of Primary Industries DroughtHub provides a one-stop online destination for information on a vast range of services and support available to primary producers, their families and communities to prepare for and manage drought conditions.

Information and resources can be accessed at:
www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/climate-and-emergencies/drouthub

Contact Local Land Services

1300 795 299

We can help with 'boots on the ground' services during times of drought. Our staff can assist producers with livestock and pasture advice, animal health issues, pest animal problems, applying for roadside grazing permits and available Traveling Stock Routes. You must also seek approval from your local council prior to placing stock on roads.

District Veterinarians:

Total: Jim Kerr.....	0439 185 275
Maitland: Kylie Greentree.....	0428 498 687
Singleton: Kristi Arnot.....	0409 758 823
Score: Jane Bennett.....	0427 322 311
Wingham: Lyndell Stone.....	0427 532 855

Agriculture Extension staff:

Simon Turpin (Team Leader).....	0427 496 549
Agronomy: Peter Beale.....	0427 007 468
Total: Col Freeman.....	0428 043 427
Score: Sarah Giblin.....	0409 785 172
Taree: Albert Mullen.....	0428 670 524
Livestock Officer: Teresa Hogan.....	0417 352 694
Pasture Officer: David Deane.....	0411 108 961

Biosecurity Officers:

Luke Booth (Team Leader).....	0408 681 576
Total: Kyra O'Brien.....	0427 492 958
Singleton: Matt Kennedy.....	0428 686 178
Score: Richard Ali.....	0429 722 944
Score: Jonathan Randle.....	0429 342 995
Wingham: Kirstin Bisley.....	0438 593 875
Wingham: Laurie Mullen.....	0407 785 007

Drought Support:

Hunter Local Land Services has a Regional Drought Support Officer, Maria Cameron, assisting landholders and communities with drought inquiries and events and working with other organisations such as the DPI's Rural Resilience Program to support local landholders. You can contact Maria via (02) 6548 2175 or directly on 0409 636 765.

Hunter Local Land Services also has a dedicated Drought Administration Officer, Anne Lantry, available to help you lodge applications with the NSW Rural Assistance Authority, including claiming Drought Transport Subsidies. You can make an appointment to meet Anne at your nearest Local Land Services office by calling 1300 795 299. Or speak to Anne direct via:
Phone: 0428 394 668
Email: anne.lantry@lls.nsw.gov.au