

DREAMS GONE DRY

How Agricultural Families Can Cope with Drought

Because agriculture relies on weather, climate, and water availability to thrive, it is easily impacted by natural events such as droughts. Droughts effect water quality and quantity, decreased crop yields, impact on feed and forage, altered plant populations, and death to livestock. Learning how to prepare for and recover from natural events and disasters is the best tool to have and will decrease their long-term effects.

Having a good drought plan can help an operation survive even the most severe drought conditions. Consider how crops, forage, and other resources have reacted to droughts in the past to create a comprehensive plan. Here are some ideas on water, land, and crop management to consider during a drought plan:



Water Management

- Evaluate and choose all types of irrigation systems that will help you lose less water to evaporation, percolation, and runoff.
- Build a water storage system that holds water for use during irrigation season.
- Store water in ditches along fields.
- Install measurement devices to keep track of water use.

Land Management

- Use crop tillage to increase soil moisture and reduce evaporation.
- Maintain and establish riparian buffers, filter strips, and grassed waterways near streams and other sources of water.
- Know your animals forage needs.
- Cull herds according to schedule that will maximize your profits

Crop Management

- Plant crops that withstand dryness, hold water, and reduce need for irrigation.
- Rotate crops in ways that increase the amount of water that enters the soil.
- Shift to cropping systems that are less water dependent.

AFTER A DROUGHT

Once a situation is over, it is still important to continue to conserve water for future droughts. Continue to be aware of how much water is used on a daily basis. Also, make changes to your home to conserve water. Below are tips on ways that can help agricultural families cope with the experience of a drought:

- Take time to look after yourself and don't allow stress to accumulate.
- Gain a sense of control, set realistic goals, and maintain a positive attitude.
- Seek financial counseling services and discuss expenditure with family members.
- Changing roles may occur within the family. During times of adjustment, spend time with family and work out the situation together.
- Improve communication with family members by listening to others ideas and establish guidelines for dealing with sensitive topics.
- Control anger by expressing and talking about feelings calmly.

After a drought has occurred, conditions do not immediately return to normal. Implement a grazing plan and allow ample rest for pastures to recover. Some pastures may require total deferment for a period to allow adequate recovery. Re-calculate your carrying capacity based on current levels of forage production. Restock slowly as forage conditions improve.



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