COST-SHARE PROGRAM TO HELP FARMERS RECOVERING FROM DROUGHT

Farmers suffering from drought damage can obtain help under a program announced Tuesday, April 29, in Raleigh. The program will cover 75 percent of the cost of restoring drought-damaged pastureland and providing additional water supply for livestock and crops.

The N.C. Agricultural Drought Recovery Program will be administered statewide through local Soil and Water Conservation district offices beginning May 1. It was made possible by a $6 million grant from the N.C. Tobacco Trust Fund Commission.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture last year designated 85 of North Carolina’s 100 counties as natural disaster areas. As of April 8, 80 counties remained under drought conditions with the other 20 considered abnormally dry.

Farmers affected by the drought may apply to one of the state’s 96 Soil and Water Conservation district offices for help with several types of projects. These include pasture renovation, drilling and redrilling wells, pond construction and renovation, converting closed lagoons to fresh water ponds, and upgrading existing irrigation systems to more efficient models.

Gary Higgins, with Buncombe County Soil & Water, has indicated that the period for requests will be from May 1 to May 14, so you should plan to call Gary and sign up if you have plans for any of the practices mentioned in the previous paragraph. If you have questions regarding this program, feel free to call Jeff Bradley at 255-5522 or Gary Higgins at 250-4786.
BUNCOMBE COUNTY CATTLEMEN’S ASSOCIATION FORMED

As many of you may know, we had a meeting on March 17 to determine the interest level of forming/reforming the Buncombe County Cattlemen’s Association. We had a good response with nearly 40 folks participating, all of whom were very supportive of forming an association.

During this meeting we discussed several things. We elected officers for the Association, developed a regular meeting schedule, discussed a focus for our group, and talked about educational topics that they would like to see at upcoming meetings.

The officers are as follows: President – Wayne Ledbetter; Vice President – TK Brown; Secretary – Christy Reeves; Treasurer – Charles Gillespie; Reporter – Alan Austin.

Our meeting schedule will be the first Thursday of January, March, June, and October, with the January meeting being the annual membership meeting. We also developed a mission statement for the group that reads: “To Promote and Support a Viable, Quality Beef Cattle Industry through Education and Youth Involvement in Buncombe County”.

The next meeting of the Buncombe County Cattlemen’s Association will be on June 12 with a program on cattle handling facilities. This location has not yet been determined, but we plan to have it out in the county. I will be mailing a letter announcing the details of this meeting at a later date. If you want more information about the Association, feel free to contact me at 255-5522.

MADISON COUNTY GRADED SALE

There will be a Graded Feeder Calf Sale on Tuesday, September 2, at the Madison County Fairgrounds. Producers will deliver their cattle to the fairgrounds on September 1. This will be a graded sale with graders from NCDA. Randy Hodge with Wilson Livestock Market will be running the sale and will buy any cattle that do not meet the grade standards. He will take these cattle back to Newport and sell them for market price. This will ensure that no one has to take cattle back home after the graded sale is complete. More information will be forthcoming about this sale.

2008 WNC PRECONDITIONED CATTLE SALES

Many of you may be looking for options when it comes to marketing your cattle. The WNC Preconditioned Cattle Marketing Association has scheduled two sales for 2008—August 7 and November 2. This is an excellent opportunity for you to add value to your calves prior to selling them. The program has weaning, vaccination, and weight guidelines that adhere to what buyers want when they buy tractor trailer load lots of cattle. An additional draw to the program is that they are weighed, sorted, and loaded out in Canton, which will save you transportation costs associated with selling your cattle.

If you are interested in participating in the August sale, you need to contact me by June 1, and for the November sale by September 1. If you are interested in obtaining more information about the WNC Preconditioned Cattle Marketing Association, feel free to contact me at 255-5522.

BRIGHT FUTURE FOR BEEF CATTLE??

Thank goodness it’s May! We made it through this past winter with some bumps and bruises; but, for the most part, we made it through better than most expected. I think the biggest thoughts are that we are just glad it is over.

Winter may be over, but our problems are not. We have to start planning now for work that needs to be done in order to carry our operations into the future. Last year’s drought is a not-so-pleasant memory in our minds, and we are still feeling the effects. I want to commend each of you who were proactive and culled parts of your herd based on your feed supplies. As I have been across the county, I have seen pastures starting to come out; but if we do not manage and take care of what we have, we will back in the same boat this year.

With fertilizer, feed, and fuel prices as high as they are, we have to pay extra attention to how we manage our operations. The grim reality of it is that unless we are well-funded from an off-farm source, or determined to make some changes in the way we manage, many of us will have a hard time producing the quality of cattle that we have in the past. That reality will decrease our revenue and may ultimately force some of us out of business. I think all of you will agree with me when I say that none of us want that to happen.
There are several management practices that we can put in place right now that will make a difference in how we get through this year. Our pastures were damaged last year, and we need to start thinking more about rotational grazing. In the past, we have not paid quite as much attention to this practice because feed and fertilizer has been affordable. I think we need to start thinking about where we can cross-fence our pastures and move our cattle more frequently. This will reduce feed wastage and spread manure more efficiently. When a cow grazes, she is taking in and passing out a high percentage of the plant nutrients that we apply as fertilizer. Taking this manure from congregational areas and spreading it on pastures is a good practice, but rotational grazing saves you this step. Why not let your cows do the work? Use caution when moving cattle from heavily weed infested areas to clean pastures, as they will be spreading weed seeds as well.

We also should consider thinking about going to a more continuous grazing system. There are plenty of opportunities for us to overseed summer and winter annuals that will give us forages to graze during the dormant stages of our cool season grasses. I know a lot of us who run here, there, and everywhere trying to make enough hay to get us through the winter. Wouldn’t it be easier to utilize the land we have and plant a forage for the cows to harvest and save our tractor fuel? Now don’t get me wrong--I am not saying to sell your hay equipment; but there are things we can do in order to reduce the amount of hay we feed during the winter months. This can be done in the summer with annuals such as sorghum/sudan or pearl millet and in the winter with annual small grains such as wheat or rye. Something else to consider would be to overseed your pastures with a legume. Legumes have the ability to provide as much as 150 lbs. of nitrogen per acre throughout the growing season. This could definitely help us save some money on our nitrogen bill.

Another thing to consider is to look at our cow sizes. We have always thought bigger was better, and that’s not totally wrong; but I think most of us realized what it took to feed those 1,400-1,500 lb cows through this past winter, and they probably didn’t pay for themselves in calf weights. It is much more practical to have an 1,000 lb cow raising a 600 lb. calf than a 1,500 lb. cow doing the same. Consider this when you select your bulls; and if you are breeding for replacement animals, remember that high yearling weights tend to lead to a bigger animal at maturity. Bigger animals at maturity that you are keeping as replacements leads to a herd full of big cows that eat a lot of feed.

I think we also need to start adding some value to our calves. Many of us rely on weekly auctions in Tennessee, Virginia, and South Carolina to market our cattle; and there is nothing wrong with that. If you are one of those producers, you need to be sure you do something you can in order to get the best price at the weekly auction. First and foremost we should use a good bull on our cow herd. A bull is half of your herd. Whether he is good or bad, his characteristics will come through in your calves. You should also castrate your bull calves. When a bull calf reaches 500 lbs. and you take him to a weekly auction, he will be discounted. Calves with horns are typically discounted at weekly auctions, so you need to dehorn or use a bull that is homozygous polled. You also should provide your cattle with a good quality mineral and forage. Rough, “mismanaged” calves will never bring as much as a calf that is slick and looks good.

There is also some opportunity for us to look differently at how we market our cattle. There are a lot of producers in Buncombe County that raise very similar cattle. Most of you attend the weekly auctions to market your cattle, and some market through the WNC Preconditioned Association sales. We need to start looking at some other options to increase what we get paid for our calves. There is a strong demand for source and age verified cattle from buyers. We need to start banding together as producers and look at forming an alliance or co-op to market our source and age verified cattle in tractor trailer load lots. It is not a task that is easily accomplished by one or two small producers; but if 15 or 20 small producers join in on the effort, I think it is something that is easily accomplished.

I realize this is a lot of information to process at once, but I feel like now is the time for us to stand back and look at how we do business. The immediate future in the cattle business is not really a pretty picture; but if we are willing to make some changes in the way we operate and utilize some of the strategies listed above, I think our future can look a little brighter.

**PASTURE WEED MANAGEMENT**

*(See Chemical Weed Control in Hay Crops & Pastures From 2008 NC Agricultural Chemicals Manual)*

http://buncombe.ces.ncsu.edu/files/library/11/ChemicalWeedControl-May08.pdf

Weeds in pastures cost producers thousands of dollars each year by reducing forage yield, lowering forage quality, and causing animal injury through toxicity or specialized plant organs (thorns and spines). Effective weed management begins with a healthy pasture. Weeds are seldom a serious problem in a well-managed, vigorously-growing pasture. Good pasture management involves the proper choice of the forage species and variety, an adequate fertility program, and controlled grazing management.

If pasture health declines through mismanagement, weeds will become established. Bare ground is the perfect environment for establishment of weeds. Once established, weeds must be controlled with mechanical or chemical methods; however,
unless the pasture-management problem that caused forage decline is corrected, the grass will not reestablish and weeds will repopulate the area.

Integrated weed management is both an economically and environmentally sound approach to weed management. An integrated approach involves scouting, prevention, and control (cultural, mechanical, and chemical) in a coordinated plan.

**Scouting**
Scouting pastures is the foundation of a sound weed management program but is often overlooked. Scouting involves routinely walking or driving through pastures and identifying weeds. This defines the scope of the problem and allows the best-management practices to be implemented in a timely fashion. The number of weeds, the species present, and their locations are important. Note the dominant species as well as uncommon or perennial weeds. The management strategies adopted should focus on controlling the dominant species, while preventing the spread of less common species. If not managed proactively, the less common weeds in a pasture may become future dominant weed problems. Proper identification is the first step in a sound weed management program.

**Prevention**
Prevention is any activity that keeps weeds from infesting a pasture. Most weeds spread by seed, so you need to prevent the movement of weed seeds onto or around your farm. Weed seeds can be transported in hay, sod, cattle, mowing equipment, or dispersed by wind, water, and wildlife. Producers should avoid buying hay or grass seed that is contaminated with weed seeds. Using certified forage seed reduces weed seed contamination and is highly recommended. Remember, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

**Cultural Control**
Cultural practices improve weed control by increasing the competitiveness of the forage. If you have a dense stand of a desirable forage in your pasture, it will be difficult for weeds to come in and take over. You, as a producer, need to soil sample your pastures to determine the pH and fertility levels and make applications as suggested. When fertilizing your pastures with high weed populations, plan to use other weed control strategies. Fertilizing a weed-infested pasture means you are not only fertilizing your grass, but weeds as well. As high as fertilizer prices are, I think we want all of our dollars going to grass and not to weeds.

**Mechanical Control**
Mowing is one of the most often used weed control methods in pastures. Mowing improves the appearance of a pasture and, if properly timed, prevents weeds from producing seed. Mowing is generally more effective on broadleaf than grass weeds and is more effective on annual weeds than perennial weeds. Carefully consider the cost of mowing and the anticipated effectiveness. As fuel prices increase, it may be more cost effective to avoid mowing and use other forms of weed control since other weed control methods may be more effective on a given species.

Mechanical weed control does have drawbacks. Large weeds with extensive root systems will not be controlled through mowing alone. If mowing is performed after seed set, seeds can accumulate on the mowing equipment and worsen the weed problem by spreading seed to other pastures.

**Chemical Control**
Chemical weed control includes the use of herbicides. Herbicides kill weeds by inhibiting plant processes that are necessary for growth. Herbicides should be selected based on forage species being grown, weed species present, cost, and ease of application. Application method and environmental impact should also be considered.

Proper herbicide choice and application rate are extremely important. Lower-than-recommended application rates will not provide consistent weed control, while excessive application rates may cause injury to the forage or result in only killing the above-ground portion of perennial weeds. Also, herbicides must be applied at the correct time to be cost effective.

Understanding the life-cycle of the weed is important when using herbicides. Some weed seeds germinate in the summer, while others germinate in the winter months. Once you have identified your weed, you may call me or refer to the herbicide label for additional information about controlling specific weeds.

The most effective and cost-efficient applications are made when the weeds have recently emerged and are small. Herbicides may be broadcast over the entire pasture or may be applied as a spot treatment to sparse weed patches. Spot
treatment is less costly compared to broadcast spraying. Other application methods include wipers and mowers that
dispense herbicide while mowing the weed. You may choose to use a herbicide that kills only weeds that are present, or you
may choose one that has some residual activity and kills weeds for a period of time after application. In all cases, it is
extremely important to carefully read the herbicide label before purchase to determine whether that herbicide controls the
weeds in your situation.

FLY CONTROL FOR THE BEEF HERD

The necessity for a fly control program for beef herds is very important, and now is the time to plan for this year. The two
major species of flies that cause the most serious decreases in beef production and require the most control efforts are the
horn fly and face fly. Tests have shown that the annoyance, irritation and blood loss caused by flies can reduce weaning
weights of calves nursing fly-infested mother cows by 12 to 14 pounds; average daily gain of grazing yearly steers may be
reduced 12 to 14 percent, or as much as 30 pounds during the grazing season. Both face flies and horn flies annoy cattle,
resulting in reduced grazing time and increased energy expenditure.

The adult horn fly, which is about one-half the size of a house fly, has piercing/sucking mouth parts and feeds on blood and
tissue fluids of cattle. They spend most of their adult life on cattle and feed 20 to 40 times a day. They are normally found on
the animal's back, but may migrate to the sides and the belly as the temperatures increase. Adult horn flies spend most of
their time on cattle, which makes their control much easier.

The face fly is about the size of a house fly. They are non-biting and feed on secretions from the eyes and muzzle. Because
they spend so little time on the animal and do not feed on blood, they are much harder to control than horn flies. When
feeding around the eyes, they cause irritation creating an environment suited to bacterial growth. As the eye becomes
irritated and begins to weep, it attracts more and more flies, adding to the irritation and opportunity for spread of infection. In
addition to being an annoyance to the animal, they are thought to be spreaders of bacterial organisms that cause pinkeye.

Cattle can tolerate low horn fly populations. When horn fly populations reach 100 to 200 per animal, it is economically
advantageous to begin a control program. There are several methods of fly control, such as insecticide sprays, dusts, pour-
on, oilers, dust bags, ear tags, oral larvicides in minerals and blocks, and controlled-release boluses. All of these methods
are effective and have a place in the control program; however, the best fly control can most likely be obtained through an
integrated fly control program.

In an integrated fly control program, two or more products that compliment each other are used. One product should give
good control where the other may be weak, thus reducing the probability of flies developing insecticide resistance. Many
cases have been reported where flies developed resistance to insecticides that were very effective when first introduced. A
good example is the organophosphate and pyrethroid ear tags that were very effective when first introduced several years
ago. This resistance most likely developed as a result of continued exposure of the fly population to the same insecticide or
same family of insecticides and/or exposure to less than lethal levels of the insecticide.

To combat this development of resistance to insecticides, a producer should consider using another method of fly control,
such as sprays, dusts, pour-ons, oral larvicides, etc. in the early part of the fly season, then putting slow-release insecticide
ear tags (containing a different family of insecticides than in the products used earlier), in early June. This will extend the
effectiveness of the ear tags further into the fall. Two tags should be applied per animal to insure that a lethal dosage of
insecticide is delivered. In order to eliminate the chance of flies receiving a sub-lethal dosage of insecticide, which can lead
to resistance, be sure to cut out old ear tags in the fall.

If you are using sprays, dusts, or pour-ons, remember they only give effective control for a specified period of time after
application. Self-application devices should be located where cattle are forced to go through to obtain water or salt to insure
daily usage. They should not be allowed to run out, and the type of insecticide used in them should also be rotated to avoid
development of resistance. Oral larvicides may be obtained in several different carriers, such as free choice minerals,
blocks, etc. These products, when fed, pass through the digestive tract of the animal and kill developing fly larvae in the
manure or inhibit their development. They are not effective against adult flies; and if your neighbor’s cattle are not receiving
an oral larvicide, you may still have fly problems.

Monitor the effectiveness of your fly control program and supplement it with another method or insecticide during the season
as necessary. The best method of fly control is the integrated approach, using several different methods and insecticides for
a longer lasting, more effective fly control program.
STOCKYARD IN CANTON TO OPEN

Johnson’s Cattle Auction, Canton, NC, will open **Wednesday, May 14**, with the sale beginning at 12:00 noon. Edward Johnson, who is operating this market, met with cattle producers on April 22 in Canton and asked the group of nearly 50 farmers if they wanted the location to be successful. With support from the group, Mr. Johnson indicated he would open his doors if farmers could wait one week for their checks on cattle sold through this auction. This would give him time to get paid from the buyers so he could, in turn, pay the producers with a good check. The consensus of the group was that they would be willing to wait since they were saving money on transportation costs. All producers selling cattle in Canton will sign a consignment form, which allows a delayed payment from the operator. Mr. Johnson is expecting that delay to be one week or less. He will be receiving cattle on Tuesdays from 1:00 pm-8:00 pm and on Wednesday mornings beginning at 8:00 am.

**UPCOMING EVENTS**

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<td>May 14</td>
<td>Johnson’s Cattle Auction opens – Canton</td>
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<td>Sale begins at 12:00 noon</td>
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<td>June 12</td>
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Livestock News... is a newsletter produced by the Buncombe, Henderson and Transylvania County Centers of North Carolina Cooperative Extension. The purpose of this newsletter is to inform and educate livestock producers about current issues related to livestock production.

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