

Drought planning

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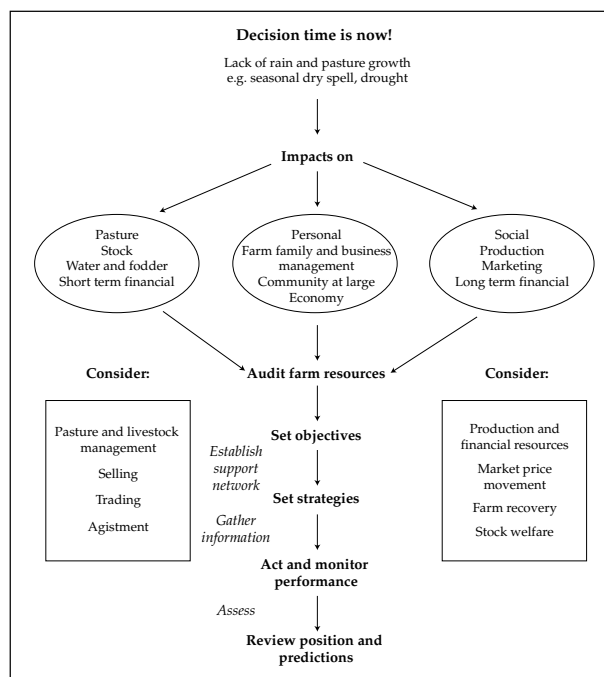
In drought management, a positive approach to the problem, a clear understanding of your objectives and a careful evaluation of alternative courses of action are essential for success. You should be realistic in your assessment of the situation and not underestimate what is required to complete a particular course of action in terms of resources (capital, fodder and management) and personal and family cost.

In drought it is important to not ignore the signs and to have a plan, act early, review and then plan again, and revise the plan with each action as you play out your strategy.

Where to start?

Step One: Check the most limiting farm resources:

- mental and physical energy to do the continuous tasks required;
- funds available;
- stock and domestic water available;
- feed reserves (paddock and stored) available;
- surface/subsoil moisture for crop leaf and root growth;
- available livestock fat reserves stored enabling controlled weight loss;
- need to service machinery – breakdowns cost time, money and frustration.



Audit sheets are provided on the following pages to assist in guiding you through the resource audit.

Step Two: Set action strategies, considering:

- breakeven position of each strategy chosen;
- windows of opportunity to adopt management practices that will be profitable during drought;
- your available resources and the implications for animal welfare, ground cover, chemical residues, etc., of carrying out each strategy;
- when situations are changing, conditional and timely fall-back options.

Step Three: Monitor and review performance, position and outlook by:

- using your established network to stay informed about key factors that affect your drought strategies;

- being proactive about the decisions made;
- being prepared for change;
- remembering that the impact falls very heavily not only on the decision makers but on the whole farm family.

To make good decisions during a drought it is necessary to assemble as much information as you can on the factors that will influence your decisions.

Information on 'what to do?' comes from:

- past dry spells and drought experiences;
- using your established rural network;
- using past trends and current predictions;
- computer decision supports to model potential strategies.

The degree of planning depends on your level of risk and how you assess your past, current and future climate, pastures, livestock and business situations.

A whole-farm plan approach is required. Targeted action strategies can be implemented, including fall-back options, forward contracts, etc. to ensure that the farm business and its goals are achieved.

Computer decision support programs like Rainman, Grazfeed, ProPlus and the newly released program StockPlan can help producers, professionals and industry to make forward planned decisions.

StockPlan is a suite of computer decision support tools that enable cattle and sheep producers to explore management options in the early stages of drought and during drought. The main aim of these decision tools is to help producers to make management decisions that minimise the environmental and financial impacts of drought. Visit www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/reader/drtplanning/stockplan.

Completing this audit will give you, the decision maker, information to assist in making drought decisions.

What livestock do you have on hand?				
Class of stock	Fat scores	Now	Can sell	Keep and Feed
1st calf heifers				
Cows with calves				
Dry cows				
Bulls				
Weaner/yearling heifers				
Weaner/yearling steers				
1-2 year old steers				
TOTALS				
Maiden ewes with lambs				
Mature ewes with lambs				
Dry ewes				
Weaned lamb				
Hoggets				
Wethers				
Rams				
TOTALS				

What feeds do you have on hand?

Feed	Quantity

Paddock feed – describe your pasture situation.

I estimate that on average my paddocks have _____ kg DM/ha

Stock water supplies

See Primefact 269 Stock water – a limited resource to help you estimate your useable stock water supplies and requirements.

Estimated total useable water	ML (A)
Stock water requirement per day for current stock	ML/day (B)
Sufficient water to supply my stock for (A ÷ B)	days

What are your priority groups of livestock to:

Sell
Feed

Stock sales

If there is no paddock feed/rain for six months what are your choices?

Sell calves	all
	some
Wean calves & feed	early calves
	late calves
Sell cows	all
	some
Sell bulls	all
	some
Sell wethers	all
	some
Sell ewes	all
	some
Sell lambs	all
	some

What income can your sale stock bring?				
Stock type	Number of stock		Estimated sale price	Total
1st calf heifers		head at		=
Cows		head at		=
Bulls		head at		=
Weaner/yearling heifers		head at		=
Weaner/yearling steers		head at		=
1–2 year old steers		head at		=
Maiden ewes with lambs		head at		=
Mature ewes with lambs		head at		=
Dry ewes		head at		=
Weaned lambs		head at		=
Hoggets		head at		=
Wethers rams		head at		=
			Total	

Discuss your drought management options with your accountant to ensure that the Australian Tax Office classifies your business as 'Drought Declared' and forced sale of stock has been necessary.

What evidence can you provide?	
Photos	Y/N
Livestock sale records	Y/N
RLPB advice	Y/N
NSW DPI advice	Y/N
Rainfall records	Y/N
Do you plan to feed? Y/N	
What will you feed?	
Will you feed cows, to get them back in calf? Y/N	
Will you feed ewes, to get them back in lamb? Y/N	
Are you using a 'sacrifice paddock' to feed stock now? Y/N	

How much do you need to feed each animal to achieve your goals?

See Section 2 of the NSW DPI publication *Managing drought* or the relevant Primefacts for details on calculating feed requirements: *Full hand feeding of beef cattle – quantities* and *Full hand feeding of sheep – quantities*.

Kg feed/day/head =	
x Number of head (.....) =	(a)
Cost/kg feed =	(b)
Total feed cost per day (a) x (b) =	\$

How long are you prepared to feed – until which month?	
How many months will that be from now?	

Finances	
How much money are you able to spend on drought feeding?	\$
How much will it cost you to feed the stock you plan to keep for the months you plan to feed?	\$

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Check for updates of this Primefact at:
www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/primefacts

Disclaimer: The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing (January 2007). However, because of advances in knowledge, users are reminded of the need to ensure that information upon which they rely is up to date and to check currency of the information with the appropriate officer of New South Wales Department of Primary Industries or the user's independent adviser.

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