

Hand feeding cattle in drought – grain

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Warning: Drought increases the risk of unacceptable residues in stock. Risks include contaminated feed, increased intake of contaminated soil, concentration of existing residues as animals lose condition, and many other causes. Refer to Primefact 312 *Drought increases residue risks* for details before purchasing stockfeed or making feeding decisions.

Feed grain requirements for maintenance

	Liveweight (kg)	Daily requirement (kg)
Weaners	200	2.5
Yearlings	250	3
Adult dry stock	400	4
Breeders, late pregnancy	425	5.5
Breeders, lactating	425	6 + 2 kg of roughage

Starting cattle on grain

- Use hay for three days (if available).
- Introduce grain gradually.

Day	Feed
Days 1 & 2	Feed hay first 0.5 to 1.0 kg grain/head
Days 3 & 4	Hay first (reduce quantity) 1.0 to 1.5 kg grain/head
Days 5 & 6	Hay first (reduce quantity) 1.5 to 2.0 kg grain/head
Days 7 & 8	Hay first (reduce quantity) 2.0 to 2.5 kg grain/head

Continue this 2-day feeding pattern, reducing hay and increasing grain, until the required grain ration is reached.

- Feed daily.
- Add sodium bentonite at 4% by weight of grain to minimise grain acidosis.

Feeding tips

- Draft cattle into feeding groups based on similar liveweight and body condition.
- Cattle should be confined for feeding when total hand feeding is adopted. The paddock should be suitable for renovation after the drought and have clean and plentiful water, shade and shelter.
- Preferably trough feed, allowing 60 cm/head. Polled and dehorned cattle are far easier to feed.
- If feeding in dumps they should be about 20 kg each (expect wastage of 6–8%).
- Always add limestone 1% by weight.
- If grain sickness occurs, drench affected stock with 120 g bicarbonate of soda in 500 mL of water followed an hour later by a drench of 500 mL of liquid paraffin, cooking oil or linseed oil.

Processing grains

For full drought feeding of cattle, it is preferable to feed grain whole rather than processed. Processing makes grain more digestible and when there is no roughage this can cause problems. There will be wastage, but this is cheap insurance.

Sorghum needs coarse cracking because it is so hard-coated. Add 1% urea when feeding sorghum.

Changing grains

Treat changing from one grain to another as if starting on grain all over again.



It is best to shandy grains, reducing the proportion of old grain over, say, 10 days, while increasing the new grain equally.

Example: changing from oats to wheat

Day	Amount
First 3 days	3 kg oats : 1 kg wheat
Days 4–6	2 kg oats : 2 kg wheat
Days 7–9	1 kg oats : 3 kg wheat
Day 10	4 kg wheat

It is best to err on the side of safety and take longer if digestive upsets occur.

Remember that you will have to shandy all changeover grains, so order them early.

Further information

For further information see Drought feeding and management of stock, or contact your nearest NSW department of Primary Industries Livestock Officer (Beef Cattle).

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Disclaimer: The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing (November 2006). 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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