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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class of stock</th>
<th>Fat scores</th>
<th>Now</th>
<th>Can sell</th>
<th>Keep and Feed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st calf heifers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cows with calves</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dry cows</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulls</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weaner/yearling heifers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weaner/yearling steers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–2 year old steers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTALS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maiden ewes with lambs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mature ewes with lambs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dry ewes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weaned lamb</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoggets</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wethers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rams</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTALS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What feeds do you have on hand?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feed</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Estimated total useable water</th>
<th>ML (A)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stock water requirement per day for current stock</td>
<td>ML/day (B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sufficient water to supply my stock for (A + B)</td>
<td>days</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sell calves</th>
<th>all</th>
<th>some</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wean calves &amp; feed</td>
<td>early calves</td>
<td>late calves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sell cows</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sell bulls</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sell wethers</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sell ewes</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sell lambs</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>some</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What income can your sale stock bring?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stock type</th>
<th>Number of stock</th>
<th>Estimated sale price</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st calf heifers</td>
<td>head at</td>
<td>=</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cows</td>
<td>head at</td>
<td>=</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulls</td>
<td>head at</td>
<td>=</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weaner/yearling heifers</td>
<td>head at</td>
<td>=</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weaner/yearling steers</td>
<td>head at</td>
<td>=</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–2 year old steers</td>
<td>head at</td>
<td>=</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Maiden ewes with lambs</td>
<td>head at</td>
<td>=</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mature ewes with lambs</td>
<td>head at</td>
<td>=</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dry ewes</td>
<td>head at</td>
<td>=</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weaned lambs</td>
<td>head at</td>
<td>=</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoggets</td>
<td>head at</td>
<td>=</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wethers rams</td>
<td>head at</td>
<td>=</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.

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 = 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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