

# Checklist for good beef cattle health and management in drought

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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.

## Herd health

Health treatments in drought are extremely important. They are a minor cost compared with feed costs. However, without adequate health care, feed costs can escalate and the end result, after expensive feeding, may still be death.

## Recommended practices

- Leptospira vaccine booster in infected or at-risk herds.
- 5-in-1 vaccination to prevent clostridial diseases.
- Lice treatment.
- Drenches:
  - for internal parasites
  - for fluke in affected areas
  - especially for bulls.
- Vitamins A, D and E after two months on dry feed, either with feed or as an injection.
- Add ground limestone to grain at 1% by weight of grain to correct any possible calcium imbalance.
- Prepare a disease (pinkeye, coccidiosis, respiratory diseases) prevention and nutrition program for early weaned calves.

## Drought problems

### Bloat

Bloat can be caused by molasses, grain or high quality Lucerne hay. Prevent by good feeding management and bloat oil/pluronic added to water.

### Grain sickness

Grain sickness is seen as 'gut kicking' and 'doughiness' when cattle are on high grain diets. Drench affected cattle with 120g bicarbonate of soda in 500mL of water, followed by a drench of liquid paraffin, cooking oil, or linseed oil an hour later.

### Urea poisoning

Symptoms are increasing respiration, excitement, bloating and salivation. Treat immediately with 0.5 litre water and 0.5 litre vinegar, mixed with 1kg of sugar or molasses as a drench.

## Management

- It is too expensive to feed all cattle. The most valuable stock should have first priority.
- Cull and feed only a nucleus of cows (4–7 years old) that are pregnancy tested in calf.
- When full hand feeding, preferably do not feed cows and calves together. Wean and feed separately. Lactating cows require twice as much feed plus roughage.
- Identify shy feeders – draft off (sell them or feed separately).
- Draft cattle into feeding groups based on similar liveweight and body condition.
- If cold snaps are likely then feeding rates must be increased by 20%, using hay.
- Suggested trough spaces are: adult 60cm; yearlings 45cm; weaners 30cm.

- Feed daily at a regular time if full grain feeding.
- Don't make any sudden changes to the feeding schedule.
- Always introduce grain gradually and change grains gradually (shandy the grains).
- Water in troughs is best. Boggy dams should be fenced off.
- Low protein roughages (sorghum stubble, some silages and low quality hay) will need some form of protein supplement.
- A small amount of roughage will reduce scouring on green feed.
- Cattle need to be trained to eat meal and grain, and time allowed for their rumen to adjust to new foodstuffs.
- Mineral deficiency is generally the least restricting factor under drought feeding conditions. If calcium (via limestone) is added to grain rations and sometimes phosphorus to molasses rations, other minerals usually need not be considered.
- Horned cattle are best fed separately from polled/dehorned cattle. Allow more trough space for horned cattle.
- Early weaned calves should be dehorned and castrated one month after weaning (if not already done).

## Further information

### Herd health & management

Contact your Local Lands Services District Vet and Senior Land Services Officer (Livestock).

## Acknowledgement

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