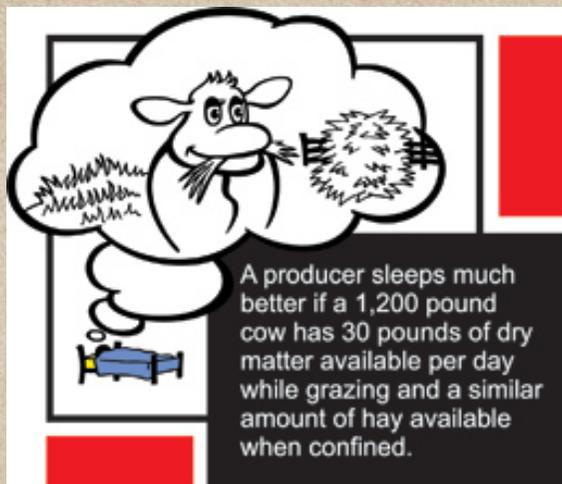




## BeefTalk 604: Drought and Stocking Rates Are Two Key Terms

### SUPPORTING MATERIALS



A producer sleeps much better if a 1,200 pound cow has 30 pounds of dry matter available per day while grazing and a similar amount of hay available when confined.

The wonderful fall of 2011 and enjoyable winter of 2012 are over. Not unlike purchases that are put on a credit for payment later, good fall and winter seasons generally require payment.

This past year, depending on where an individual lives, has set records for warm, moistureless days. Last spring and summer, as those in the north country battled excess snow and spring rain, only the occasional Southern drought article found itself on the list of things to read.

Anyone who has been around well knows how quickly things can change. One often wonders why weather is the first thing in a conversation. Once one appreciates how quickly and seriously

weather can change, it seems very appropriate to start the day's greetings with "How are you?" and "How is the weather?"

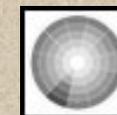
If the current weather holds, that Southern drought may very well mean some dry weather to the north. There seems to be some promise of seasonal moisture, but the short-term forecast does not seem to be brewing much excitement for rain.

Either way, Mother Nature decides when it is time to bring us or not bring us rain. In the ranching community, it is always serious. Even though ranchers cannot control Mother Nature, plans can be developed and put in place to accommodate the weather prediction models.

Ranch operations that have effective grazing systems in place are in a position to manage through dry and wet periods without upsetting the focused direction of the operation. There are many, many processes to steer the operation. However, keep in mind the basic principle that a producer sleeps much better if 30 pounds of dry matter per day are known to be available for a 1,200- pound cow while she is grazing and a similar amount is destined to end up in a



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haystack somewhere for every day the 1,200-pound cow needs to be fed when confined.

Granted, these are very coarse numbers that have a significant cushion for waste and some carryover. One knows that larger cows need more and smaller cows need less. If a producer can find six months of grazing, then six 1,000-pound bales should get baled and hauled home to provide a feed base for the nongrazing month, and adequate acres need to be available during the grazing period.

How many acres? To answer the question, each producer needs to visit a range specialist familiar with the local landscape to get the correct number of cow-calf pairs grazing at the proper times.

Producers in southwestern North Dakota ranching in similar conditions as the Dickinson Research Extension Center and running 1,200-pound cows could anticipate a range from lowland, good range conditions with a stocking rate of 1.43 acres per animal unit month all the way up to 6.88 acres per animal unit month in pastures that are in fair range condition and dry, according to Lee Manske, DREC range specialist.

Typically, upland landscapes that are in good range condition could be stocked at 2.29 acres per animal unit month if the producer is running 1,200-pound cows. That would equate to just less than 14 acres per cow in a very generic sense. This would result in 14 grazing acres and six acres of hay, provided 1,000 pounds of hay comes from each acre. In a normal year, the bottom line is that 2,000 productive acres would allow a producer the ability run 100 mother cows and their calves until weaning and allow for a good night's sleep.

If you travel east, by the time you get out of North Dakota, you very easily could be closer to 1,300 acres. If you travel west or to drier climates, the acre requirement is going to go up. None of us have a direct line to Mother Nature. Even Mother Nature simply averages the good with the bad and goes on from year to year.

In these years where it appears to be drying out, take a quick count of your acres and your cattle. Figure out what type of land you are grazing and what your typical hay yields are going to be, and get a good estimate of the weight of your cows.

If all these numbers start to add up to more than what the books are telling you, a survival plan needs to be put in place, which means selling cows or buying hay. Don't panic, assess your unit first, seek out good advice, develop a plan and then stick to it.

May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at <http://www.BeefTalk.com>. For more information, contact the NDBCIA Office, 1041 State Ave., Dickinson, ND 58601, or go to <http://www.CHAPS2000.com> on the Internet.

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