



BeefTalk 730: Wet and Dry; There Is No Constant

SUPPORTING MATERIALS

Two Images Every Cattle Producer Should Review

Drought and moisture maps at:
<http://droughtmonitor.unl.edu>
and
<http://tinyurl.com/droughtmon>

The center, as with all producers, embarks on a management regime that adds and subtracts cattle, and moves cattle to take timely advantage of a plant's response to moisture.

The use of the word "sustainability" often is an indication that someone is searching for a simple, normal approach to life. In other words, the ability to fit in without the pressures of uncertainty.

Is that possible? Can a cattle operation be "sustainable" in the long run or are the dynamics of the world around us too strong?



Full Color Graphic
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Grayscale Graphic
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Instead of sustainability, what we really may need is an organized response to ever-present change. As cattle producers, how we respond to the environment is key to our survival. The world is covered with water and plants. How we use the plants depends on how consumers look at their plates.

For some, managing the world's plants involves expanded usage and consumption of the plants. However, in the livestock business, the proliferation of plants enables the expansion of livestock.

Ultimately, as water comes and goes, so do plants. The National Drought Mitigation Center at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration cooperatively produce the U.S. Drought Monitor.

Its website (<http://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/>) shows the week's drought intensity by various shades of color from dark red to yellow. Currently, significant parts of California, Nevada and selected small parts of Texas are involved in an exceptional drought. In a broad sense, the Southwest is dry and it continues up into the western states.

Where is the moisture? Another U.S. drought portal that is a cooperative effort among many governmental agencies is the National Integrated Drought Information System at <http://tinyurl.com/droughtmon>.

The map shows total moisture storage with respect to long-term averages. If you look at the map, light green to dark means medium to above-average storage. The red and yellow indicate below-normal water storage, which we call

drought. The image is very interesting and worth seeing.

As with many models, trying to understand all the data that goes in is difficult, but with today's wonderful computer graphics, the visual image can inform quickly.

In this case, the Dickinson Research Extension Center is green, as is central Montana, which means very good to extreme storage. There are several green spots as you move east around the Great Lakes region and all the way to Maine.

The yin and the yang, two very opposite forces of dry and wet conditions moving about the world, feeding the living system we live in. This is the world of water and plants. As water is withheld, the plants contract but expand again when the world is watered. For livestock producers, as the plants die, so do the livestock. As the plants regrow, the livestock resurge. That is called nature. For producers, it is called flexibility.

I can remember grazing seasons when the end date came sooner than desired. The grass was gone and the cows were wandering. Today, we are doing the wandering as we try to find the cows in the tall grass.

Forage is not lacking at the center. In fact, copious amounts of forage exist - much more than the center's livestock herd can consume. As winter sets in, the green will turn to white, and those areas that have copious amounts of moisture will shiver and moan, while those that are dry will at least not be welcoming snow. This is why the beef business is and always will be a challenging industry.

Producers constantly are trying to negotiate the yin and yang. They are trying to find that perfect spot that really does not exist. The point and challenge is that beef producers are seeking sustainability: in other words, the slow process of changing stocking rates to reflect the changing plant communities in response to changing moisture supplies.

The concepts of grazing and stockpiling forage are critical to the survival of a beef operation, as well as the need in many parts of the country to make hay to accommodate the seasons when there is no growth.

The center, as with all producers, embarks on a management regime that adds and subtracts cattle, and moves cattle to take timely advantage of a plant's response to moisture. The moisture is not sustainable, but the ranch planning to use that moisture is.

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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