



FACT SHEET

MARCH 2014

GUIDANCE ON EXTREME DRY MANAGEMENT

Yet again Northland is experiencing an extended period of dry weather, meaning many of you are facing another challenging time on farm. This fact sheet provides help and guidance on managing the effects of such extreme dry. It includes top line advice on the main factors to consider, plus references to sources of further information. First and foremost: **Don't delay. Plan. Prioritise.**



KEY AREA MANAGEMENT

The key areas of management during a period of extreme dry are: your overall business, feed supply, stock, land management. Don't try to do everything at once; make it manageable. Set yourself short and long-term goals, starting with the areas of greatest need, e.g. feed supply and demand. The sooner you start managing the situation, the sooner you'll regain control.

Short term

Long term

1. BUSINESS

- Write a plan and inform staff
- Determine critical decision dates
- Consult accountant and bank regarding cash flow
- Consult staff re future management depending on length of dry period

2. FEED

- Estimate available feed and stock water. Decide how best to use it
- Consider options:
 - supplementary feed: if/what/when
 - grazing off
 - share farming
- Plan for longer periods of dry

3. STOCK

- Prioritise feed use
- Decide which stock to sell if required
- Rebuild stock units
- Decide whether to delay mating
- Consider body conditioning

4. LAND MANAGEMENT

- Check adequacy of shaded areas for stock
- Measure soil structure, soil loss
- Check for over grazing
- Plan for next year's production
- Consider sacrifice paddocks

1. BUSINESS

Write a plan so it can be shared and acted upon by everyone involved in your business. Include dates by which key decisions need to be made.

Don't just keep it all in your head. Staff and family are all facing the challenges a period of extreme dry delivers. Involving them in the management plan can help them make a contribution, feel valued and give you valuable support.

If the dry persists, include the financial impacts on your cashflow in the management plan. Consult your accountant and bank manager proactively, and keep them informed.

2. FEED

Measure how much of feed is available. Be conservative as feed is likely to be of a lower quality than normal. Include all sources of available feed, such as hay, silage, baleage and grain. Consider forecasted grass growth. Construct a simple feed budget and review it regularly, i.e. weekly.

If feed supply is not going to meet demand, consider the following options:

- Supplementary feed: a simple way to overcome feed deficit, with the benefits usually outweighing the cost.
- Grazing off: the earlier the better to gain greatest benefit. Farmer networks are particularly helpful here, including your stock agent.
- Share farming: again, the earlier the better and most easily accessed through local networks.

Remember to consider water availability for stock as well as feed. Water stress is just as crucial to animal performance as feed intake.

3. STOCK

Prioritise feed demand and supply. Feed demand is reduced by selling stock, with early decisions often proving less costly. The main advantages of improving cashflow and reducing feed demand need to be weighed up against the disadvantages of reducing capital stock. Animal welfare is also important, plus a lack of feed or water makes animals more susceptible to other disorders, i.e. worms.

Decision dates and setting priorities are critical, e.g. if it doesn't rain by 20th, sell R2 cattle. A suggested priority for de-stocking:

1. Prime animals
2. Store stock, including calves and lambs
3. Capital stock, e.g. cows & ewes
4. Cattle versus sheep – cattle generally trade easier than sheep during these times

Longer term, reducing body condition scoring to maximise feed supply can be considered but requires careful monitoring. Another option is to delay mating, although the long-term effect on lamb production needs to be taken into account. A combination of these options might best suit your business.

4. LAND MANAGEMENT

Review the adequacy of water supply and shaded areas for stock. In an area often affected by extended dry periods, increasing shaded areas should be included in the long-term management plan.

Dry periods, and/or their effects, can span more than one season, i.e. an autumn drought can seriously impact on the following lamb crop. You may need to sacrifice paddocks to avoid over-grazing and reduce impact on the following year's pasture production.

Soil structure, fertility, and therefore stability, are at risk as moisture levels reduce. Soil loss can also occur with

reduced organic matter and increased exposure to wind. Consider rebalancing soil nutrients.

The effects of the dry are felt even after it's started raining, particularly if the rain is short-lived and insubstantial. It pays to stay vigilant long after the rain clouds reappear.

FURTHER SUPPORT AND INFORMATION

General enquiries: B+LNZ Extension Manager on 027 489 7343

Federated Farmers: 0800 376 844

Rural Support Trust: 0800 787 254

Weather forecasts: MetService:

www.metservice.com, 3 and 5 day Rain Radar

WeatherWatch: www.weatherwatch.co.nz

NIWA: www.niwa.co.nz

Animal welfare issues: Ministry for Primary Industries: 0800 00 83 33

New Zealand Veterinary Association: 04 471 0484

Financial assistance: Work and Income: 0800 559 009

Counselling: Lifeline: 0800 543 354

Depression helpline: 0800 111 757

B+LNZ RESOURCES

A guide to feed planning for sheep farmers

Rumen acidosis factsheet

Ewe body condition scoring handbook and worksheet

Condition scoring for beef cows

Pasture quality principles and management – The Q-Graze manual

Call **0800 BEEFLAMB (0800 233 352)** to request copies of any of the resources listed above. Beef + Lamb New Zealand also runs delivery-ready workshops relevant to managing an extreme dry period. These include: Feed Budgeting, Body Condition Scoring, Land and Environment Planning. Contact your Extension Manager on 027 489 7343 or call 0800 233 352 for more information about workshops in your region.

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