

**For Immediate Release
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Are pastures ready for cattle?

It is hard to believe, but spring is here. Calving is progressing rapidly, and the grass is finally growing due to recent rain. Many people are in the field some producers might even be considering turning some of their cattle out to pasture. After all it is almost May and the grass is green, but should color or calendar be the deciding factor?

Now I hate to admit the obvious, but once again spring has been drier than normal. There have been a few nice showers, and the pastures have finally started to turn green, but has it been enough and will there be more? Regardless of the answer, dry conditions over the past few years have depleted the energy storages and weakened the root systems of native grasses. It is for these reasons that pasture management is critical for the next few years.

One management practice that can help grasses get a head start is deferred grazing. Although green, the grasses might not be ready for grazing. As a General rule, grazing native range should be deferred until the grass can reach the four leaf stage. The extra growth not only yields more forage, but it is also extremely beneficial to the plants. The extra growth helps trap more solar energy and assists in root growth. Delayed grazing alone will not help to maintain healthy range conditions. Stocking rates also need to be adjusted appropriately.

Reducing stocking rates doesn't necessarily mean just running less animal units. There are many other options as outlined in SDSU Extension Extra 2033. For starters

cattle can be fed supplemental feed to help reduce pasture intake, but try to avoid using a high protein source. The increased digestibility could actually increase the intake demands. Special care and management of the calves is another option. Providing creep feed for the calves will reduce the amount of forage they consume, leaving more for the cows. This of course does have added costs. Also, early weaning of calves has been shown to reduce the forage intake of cows by 20%, and is another option if facilities, labor and feed are available. A few more viable options include grazing of cereal grains, frequently rotating pastures and if worse comes to worse feeding in a dry lot or selling.

Regardless of the management practices used, it is important that re-growth occurs in the spring and overgrazing of stressed plants is avoided. Proper management today, means more for the future.

To view SDSU Extension Extra 2033 and other drought related materials, they can be found online at: http://ars.sdstate.edu/extbeef/Drought_Management.htm