



Animal Health & Nutrition Specialists!

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Drought Feeding

With the continued dry weather particularly in the south of the state some properties are now at the stage where they are running out of grass. In this situation feeding needs to switch from supplementation which provides the nutrients that are lacking in the pasture to full feeding to supply all of the beast's requirements. As full feeding is a much more expensive and time consuming situation than supplementation choosing which stock to feed is very important.

All dry stock should be either sold or put onto a production feed so that they can be finished quickly and disposed of. Cows should be pregnancy tested and empty cows sold. If it is necessary to lower breeder numbers cull older cows that would have been sold in the next few years anyway. The next class of stock to consider culling are the lower performing cows in the herd.

Hay is often a very expensive option for drought feeding in terms of the nutrients it provides. All stock will require some roughage to help fill the rumen and provide scratch factor. Scratch is important to stimulate the rumen. Without scratch factor the rumen will not have peristaltic movements which act to stir the rumen contents and allow digestion to proceed. Feed tests on hay are important as the quality can vary over a wide range. If the bulk of required nutrients is being provided by concentrates such as grain, protein meals and molasses a low quality hay is suitable however the price should reflect the lower quality.

When there is less than 1200kg of dry matter per hectare left in the paddock stock will be using more energy chasing this feed than they are getting from it. In this situation move all stock to a smaller paddock. This has the added advantage of not damaging the pastures and allowing better recovery when rain does come.

If the drought persists consider early weaning as it is much cheaper to feed a cow and calf separately than as a single unit. This will allow the cows a better chance of getting back into calf which will have a major affect on income for future years. Calves can be weaned down to 80kg live weight but need to be fed a high protein diet to maintain growth and to avoid having small woody weaners that will never perform. Another option to consider is creep feeding. While this does not help the cow it can prevent stunted calves and allow calves to be weaned earlier than they would otherwise.

When it does rain continue to keep stock locked up until there is at least some bulk in the paddocks. This prevents them from chasing the green pick which slows pasture recovery and cause them to lose more condition. It can be heartbreaking to nurse stock through a drought to have them die after rain.

When feeding for survival with little or no pasture the complete range of nutrients including energy needs to be fed. As this can be a very costly exercise decisions need to be made about which stock to feed and which classes of stock should be sold. Early weaning, creep feeding and production feeding are all useful tools to minimise the impact of drought. For specific advice on rations for drought or production feeding please give me a call and we can balance your feed to provide the nutrients that your stock require.

