

WINTER DROUGHT

Are you ready for a winter drought? Its appearance is much different from a summer drought but the effect is the same.

A summer drought occurs when a lack of rain causes greatly reduced plant growth and, therefore, much less grazing and hay production. So what does a winter drought look like, at least from the perspective of a livestock producer in the central Great Plains or Corn Belt?

In contrast to a summer drought where lack of rain can cause a brown, barren landscape, a winter drought has abundant moisture. However, that moisture is in the form of ice or deep snow, often creating what some people might characterize as a picturesque landscape.

Despite all the moisture as snow and ice, I call this a drought because the affect on livestock is similar to a summer drought. Corn stalks, winter range, and other grazed forages are covered by snow or ice, making them inaccessible. Sometimes it is even impossible to get access to previously harvested and stored feeds like hay and silage.

Are you ready if this happens to you? Some winter forage already has been covered although we hope the snow will melt away soon so animals can get back to it. But what if they can't? What is your backup plan? If your backup plan is hay, do you have enough? Can you get it to your animals after an ice storm? And if it needs to be supplemented, is that on hand and positioned to get to your animals?

We usually are prepared for normal winter stresses and even occasional storms. But what are your plans if the winter drought I've described does occur. It can hit much more rapidly than a summer drought.

Think about it. And be prepared.

Dr. Bruce Anderson, Extension Forage Specialist
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
314 Keim Hall—East Campus
Lincoln NE 68583-0915
402-4742-2577
banderson1@unl.edu

