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Extreme Heat / Drought

Key Messages

1. Some ranchers have planned alternate arrangements for watering herds during droughts.
2. Extreme heat is generally more stressful to cattle than extreme cold.
3. Cattle should have access to natural or man-made areas that provide heat relief.

Drought is a slow-onset emergency that can devastate a herd. Excessive heat may or may not accompany a drought. Although occurring less frequently than some other emergencies in BC, extreme heat can result in reduced weight gain, heat-related illnesses, and death to beef cattle. Planning ahead will help protect the health and well-being of your herd.

Availability of Water and Feed

Cattle cool themselves through panting and water evaporation from the skin. Animals must replace the water that is needed for cooling. Water sources are often limited during the pre-cise time when water needs of cattle increase. Feed availability may also be limited.

Additional Information

BC Farm Animal Care Council: <http://www.bcfacc.ca/>

Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Beef Cattle: <http://www.nfacc.ca/codes-of-practice/beef-cattle>

Environment Canada Weather Forecasts: https://weather.gc.ca/canada_e.html

Water Requirements for Cattle

Cattle require different amounts of water given the ambient temperature.





Extreme Heat / Drought

Extreme Heat / Drought Preparedness

My preparedness steps for extreme heat /drought include the following:

- Prepare to provide emergency water and feed resources, if needed.
- Reduce herd size to conserve resource demands in anticipation of extreme, prolonged drought.
- Identify areas of natural protection for exposed animals, including:
 - a. Shade trees
 - b. Breezy, ventilated locations

Action Items / Notes

Extreme Heat / Drought Response

My response steps for extreme heat/ drought include the following:

During Extreme Heat

- Move animals to areas of natural protection, if required, noting that animals get sunburned like people, especially on ears and nose.
- Feed animals later in day in cooler temperatures, if possible.
- Limit the handling of animals, especially midday.
- Monitor animals for signs of heat stress, such as:
 - a. Increased respiration rate or panting
 - b. Excessive salivation
 - c. Elevation of the head to make it easier to breathe
 - d. Open mouth breathing

During a Drought

- Move my animals to additional pastures or range.
- Ensure animals have a consistent supply of water.
- Monitor available natural water sources, such as ponds and streams.
- Check water delivery systems periodically for proper function, if applicable.

- Identify water sources where dry conditions may lead to undrinkable or toxic water, considering toxic blue-green algae and concentrated salts and minerals.
- Monitor animals for signs of dehydration, such as:
 - a. Rapid, shallow breathing
 - b. Reluctance to move
 - c. Drying of mucous membranes, i.e. eyes, nose, mouth
 - d. Decreased skin flexibility

Notes

Additional information to include with this section:

- Plans to provide emergency water and feed resources.