

Managing Drought Risk on the Ranch: Introduction and Climate Outlook

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Abstract

Drought is a recurring threat to the financial and natural resources health of ranch operations in Nebraska, and the drought of 2012 is no exception. According to the U.S. Drought Monitor (<http://droughtmonitor.unl.edu>), as of July 17, 2012, nearly 86% of Nebraska was experiencing drought conditions ranging from moderate to extreme severity. Studies have shown that drought losses associated with such events can be significantly minimized through ranchers' efforts to prepare for drought.

Therefore, staff members of the National Drought Mitigation Center at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) have been working with a group of ranchers and advisors from across the Great Plains and other collaborators from UNL and South Dakota State University to better understand the effects of drought on ranching operations and strategies that can be implemented to reduce drought losses. This work has been funded by the USDA Risk Management Agency. A primary outcome of the project has been the creation of an online resource called *Managing Drought Risk on the Ranch* (<http://www.drought.unl.edu/ranchplan>). This website offers guidance on actions that can be taken before, during, and after drought to better prepare for, respond to, and recover from drought conditions. In addition, it provides a step-by-step methodology on how to integrate these strategies into a drought plan tailored for an individual operation.

Specifically, the drought planning portion of the website describes a series of actions to consider when developing a drought plan, such as:

- Identifying drought planning partners and establishing communication;
- Identifying the ranch vision and objectives;
- Inventorying ranch resources;
- Understanding drought risks and benefits;
- Defining and monitoring drought;
- Identifying critical dates for making decisions;
- Identifying strategies to be implemented before, during, and after drought; and
- Monitoring and evaluating the drought plan.

The expectation of this work is that creating a clear and usable planning methodology, along with relevant supporting information, will lead to increased drought planning among ranchers that will help to lessen the drought vulnerability of their operations and the grasslands that support them.