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The opportunity to grow the beef herd during the prolonged drought in huge areas has, at best, been a frustrating situation. Solutions for a producer's decision-making process include gathering information, consultation and plotting a course of action. The action taken will depend and be influenced by the availability of resources. Such items include capability to grow cereal crops for pasture or greenfeed, ability to temporarily fence cropland, ability to haul water and the data to make adjustments to the enterprise for the long run.

Most will have started this decision process and, while the ultimate action taken is solely dependent on the operator, there is information that could make the feeding of your beef herd easier. Included in this approach will be to logically think about each segment or portion of the feeding schedule, running from pasture grazing to summer seeded cereals.

### **Emergency Pasture Options**

Cold weather during the spring has delayed pasture development and along with the drought has made pasture shortages a certainty in areas with prolonged drought, and marginal in many other areas of the province. Even with early rains it is unlikely perennial pastures will last through to fall or early September. Annual cereals, utilized as annual pasture or greenfeed are real options for producers during times of limited rainfall.

Options to extend and complement pasture usage involve seeding winter wheat, fall rye, barley, spring wheat or oats for July grazing. Cereals as annual crops show the greatest potential for grazing, particularly winter wheat and fall rye, which could potentially last into the fall grazing season if managed properly. These two crops tiller upon grazing and will remain vegetative in the establishment year before being vernalized or changed by the cold weather. Stocking rates on annual forages need to be adjusted to reduce trampling losses and prevent cereals from heading and losing quality. Rotational grazing may be useful to achieve the required grazing pressure and allow for plant recovery following grazing.

Cereals can also be used as winter-feed supplies. Due to the overgrazing of pastures, some producers have been forced to graze their hay lands as an emergency measure. This places tremendous pressure on the upcoming winter feed supplies. In periods of drought, lower than normal hay production can be expected, particularly for hay land in which a perennial grass is the dominating forage species. Perhaps the best alternative source of feed in these trying

circumstances is to grow cereals as a forage crop harvested as greenfeed. Cereals tend to produce higher yields with medium forage quality as compared to grass hays under drought conditions. The agronomics of growing cereals as a forage crop is not complicated. Seeding of cereals should be done in the months of June to mid-July to allow for cutting and baling before frost in the fall. The cereal crop that best makes a forage crop is oats. Oats is a low input crop that is well suited to many areas of the province and has good acceptability by cattle. Other cereals put up for forage (or silage) include barley, triticale, and in some cases salvaged wheat crops. Barley is more drought tolerant than oats. Therefore it is preferred in the brown and dark brown soil zones. An important consideration in producing barley for a forage supply is to seed smooth-awned varieties. It should be noted that if access to certified seed is a problem, common seed could be used as an alternative.

Just about any cereal crop variety that can be baled or silaged is better than no feed at all.

A decision on feeding your cowherd during periods of drought starts now as an emergency measure and is an individual specific process. If pasture and hay supplies are short, and the culling of cows has reached a critical point, producers must consider all options.

For help with your drought strategy in feeding your cowherd, please contact your local Livestock and Feed Extension Specialist with Saskatchewan's Ministry of Agriculture or the ministry's Agriculture Knowledge Centre at 1-866-457-2377. You can also email Dr. Bart Lardner at [bart.lardner@usask.ca](mailto:bart.lardner@usask.ca).