

Water Is Important for Beef Cattle

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During drought conditions, the shortage of water for beef cattle can become a problem.

Water is one of the most important nutrients required by animals and must be provided on a daily basis.

During dry weather a shortage of water can occur before a producer realizes there is a problem. Ponds and springs dry up rather quickly and wells can go dry also.

Water quality is also a problem during dry weather. Ponds and other sources of water get low and thus concentrate any contaminants that may be present. Ponds may have algae present that pose water quality problems. Also, water quality may be reduced simply because animals entering the pond may stir up mud thus making the remaining water very low in quality.

Keeping animals out of ponds is desired if possible. Providing water tanks using pond or another source of water should be considered.

Water tanks or commercial waterers can provide cleaner water and also provide water that is cooler than water in a pond. An effort must be made to keep the tanks and waterers clean so animals have a desire to drink from that source.

When it is hot and dry, cattle will consume more water than a beef producer would think. Be sure to check water supplies daily to ensure that animals do not run out of water. To get an estimate on water consumption, refer to the table below.

Estimated Daily Water Intake of Beef Cattle, Gallons/Day ¹							
Daily High Temp.(F ^o)	Cows Nursing Bred Calves ²	Dry Cows	Bulls	Growing and Finishing Cattle			
				400 lbs.	600 lbs.	800 lbs.	1000 lbs.
Gallons/day							
35	11	6	7	4	5	6	8
50	13	7	9	5	6	7	9
65	16	8	11	6	7	9	11
80	18	11	13	7	9	10	14
95	20	15	20	11	15	17	19

¹Source: Water for Beef Cattle, Tennessee Cow-Calf Handbook, Fact Sheet SR 2002, 1996.

²First four months of lactation.

In summary, don't forget that in a drought, animals need to be supplied adequate water in addition to feed, For additional information on water for beef cattle, contact the local Extension office.