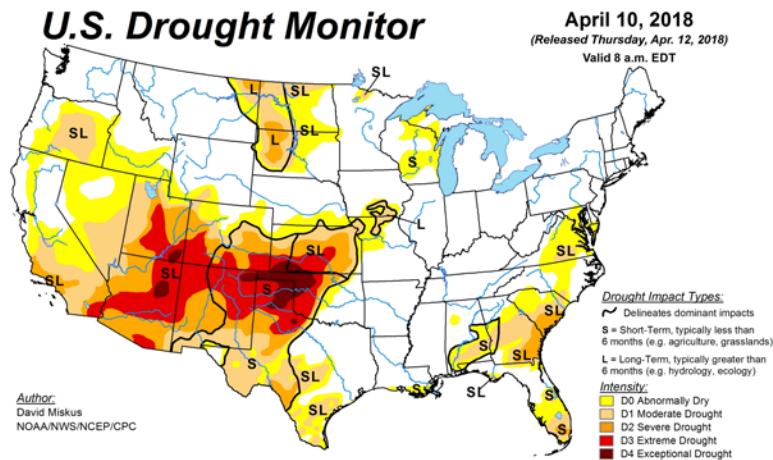


## Be Thinking Ahead

Drought, is it lurking around the corner? What should a cattleman be thinking about?

IF you look at the current drought map you will see significant drought is building up to our southwest. Truly, you don't have to go very far to the west to see signs of drought. In some parts of the Flint Hills Region of Kansas, cattle managers are calling cattle owners from other parts of the US, stating they don't have pasture water and that they need to look for other locations for summer grazing. So, cattlemen, we need to have a plan that covers "WHAT IF."



Putting up or purchasing hay is always an expense, but it can really get expensive if you trying to feed your way through a drought without a plan. During a drought grass and hay supplies are both limited and what you find can be really expensive, especially as demand increases. To avoid some of those issues we need to identify and manage for forage shortages before they occur.

Plan ahead, remember forage production is tied to rainfall and timing of the rainfall. Watch the weather, what has it been like over the past few months, what does the long term forecast look like. Perhaps you should set some dates to review forage production and rainfall.

In our area of the state we normally get 17-18% of our annual rainfall in late fall through winter (November 1 - February 28.) So, let's make **March 1<sup>st</sup>** the first date to look at when thinking about summer pasture and hay. Here is how the moisture shakes out for us in Frontier Extension District for this time period this year.

### ***November 1<sup>st</sup> thru February 28<sup>th</sup>***

#### **Anderson County**

2.39 inches of rain  
7.46 normal rainfall  
32% of normal

#### **Osage County**

2.35 inches of rain  
6.7 normal rainfall  
35% of normal

#### **Franklin County**

0.94 inches of rain  
6.75 normal rainfall  
44% of normal

### ***Annual Rainfall***

#### **Anderson County**

40.87 inches

#### **Osage County**

39.49 inches

#### **Franklin County**

39.76 inches

This information should be our first warning that drought might be a consideration. We definitely come through the winter without normal precipitation.

In Frontier District, our second date to help us make decisions should be about June 1<sup>st</sup>. We typically get about 30% of our annual rainfall from March 1<sup>st</sup> thru June 1<sup>st</sup>. For us our March totals were closer to normal ranging from 85% of normal in Anderson County to 96% of normal in Osage County. However, if we are still receiving below normal rainfall by June 1<sup>st</sup> we should consider ways that reduce grazing pressures on our pastures. This may be too early to wean our spring calves, which will reduce grazing pressure as the cows energy needs will go down about 30%. Calves over 100-110 days old can be weaned and are very efficient gainers at that time. If you have fall calving cows perhaps you should look at more selective culling- old cows, those with bad temperaments, or those that are oddballs in your herd.

The third date to look at rainfall info might be October 1<sup>st</sup>. From June 1<sup>st</sup> thru October 1<sup>st</sup> we usually receive 45% of our annual moisture. If those rains don't come, especially those in late August or early September our fall growth of fescue will be reduced affecting both stock piled fescue that will be used later during the winter as well as our fall pasturing of those cool season grasses.

IF by November 1<sup>st</sup>, we are at or below 80% of our normal rainfall for the year (about 32") dry conditions will most likely continue into the winter and the next spring. At that point you should be prepared to reduce stocking rates for the next grazing season, unless rainfall conditions change. Reduced stocking rates are critical in keeping our pastures healthy.

Keep in mind, if you are dry so is your neighbor, so liquidate those cull cows before the market is flooded with drought cattle.

The KEY is to LOOK AHEAD, LOOK BEHIND, MEASURE and HAVE A PLAN- Hay is expensive compared to having the cow doing the harvesting.