

Dealing with Drought



Where Has All the Hay Gone?

*A rapid communications series brought to you by the
Michigan State University Beef Team*

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For the past few years Michigan had favorable weather conditions and abundant forage supplies across much of the State. Even with rising production costs for fuel and fertilizer to name a few, Michigan hay prices remained moderate. This spring as the U.S.D.A. reported that the United States had the lowest season ending hay stocks of the last fifty years, Michigan hay prices only ticked up slightly. This was because of the abundant hay stocks that we carried over in Michigan.

How quickly the tables have turned. We are now labeling two-thirds of the State of Michigan as being in a moderate to severe drought. Hay prices have jumped 25% and are heading higher each week that significant rainfall is not received. Dairy, livestock and other animal farms are scrambling to guarantee they have enough forage to get them through to the next cropping year.

Borrowing a term from the movies, it appears like the perfect storm is gathering over Michigan pertaining to the forage supply. Last fall's rise in corn price sent out the message to plant more corn acres in 2007 at the expense of plowing down hay acres. Then a late freeze in April of 2007 wiped out the entire first cutting crop for much of the Central U.S. from Tennessee to Kansas and Ohio to Iowa. Then drought conditions settled into all States east of the Mississippi River with the exception of Illinois and the Northeast. Compounding the dry weather in Michigan were heavy attacks from the alfalfa weevil on first cutting alfalfa.

Michigan hay yields were down 10 - 40% on first cuttings, 25 - 75% on 2nd cuttings, and

will be non existent on other cuttings unless rain returns. Pastures grasses are quickly disappearing and baled hay is being fed to stretch the pasture forage supply. Corn is standing still, and some areas of the State have already suffered permanent yield loss in corn grain and silage yields. Finally, the alternative of feeding a cheap grain source like corn to replace hay is also gone with corn having doubled in price.

Hay prices, like many other ag commodities, will be quite volatile over the next few years as we adjust to this ethanol demand for more corn. Alfalfa/grass mixed hays are running \$70 -100 per ton in round bales and \$95 - 135 in large or small square bales. Dairy quality alfalfas are running \$90 - 135 per ton in round bales and \$130 - 200 per ton in large or small square bales. Surrounding State hay prices are running higher than Michigan and are expected to move Michigan prices higher in the short term.

Hay can still be found in Michigan as long as someone is willing to pay the price. Anyone wishing to buy or sell hay can go to the Michigan Hay Sellers List. The internet address is <http://web2.canr.msu.edu/hay> Those without internet access may contact their county MSU Extension Office.

Over the next few weeks the Michigan State University Extension Beef Team will issue a series of news releases to help livestock producers cope with this extremely difficult situation. Articles will include: strategic culling, early weaning, alternative feeds you can find in a drought year, and more. Watch for the articles in this publication or at the Beef Team's web site at <http://beef.ans.msu.edu/Drought/drought.htm>

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