WVDA Offers Tips to WV Livestock Farmers Experiencing Drought Conditions

Charleston W.Va. -- In response to numerous concerns from livestock farmers, the West Virginia Department of Agriculture (WVDA), in conjunction with the West Virginia Conservation Agency (WVCA), WVU Extension Service and USDA-Farm Service Agency (FSA), is offering tips to farmers currently suffering from water shortages.

“We have had a dry, warm spell here in West Virginia. When the weather gets this hot, farmers have to use extra resources to keep crops, as well as animals healthy. As traditional sources of water run low, farmers are forced to find alternative sources,” said Commissioner of Agriculture Kent Leonhardt.

Below are some tips for livestock farmers experiencing dry conditions:

- Make sure livestock have adequate high-quality water - low in minerals such as salts, sodium, iron, sulfur and aluminum
- Ensure cattle are not heat stressed, watch for panting. As the season progresses and temperature cools, heat stress is less likely
- If you are out of pasture, confine animals to one pasture or aftermath hayfield with adequate water and feed hay
- Do not make the cattle clean up all the hay. Allow for 10% refusal to ensure that they have adequate feed
- The best field or pasture to feed on is one that has a lower soil test value for potassium (K) and phosphorus (P). The soil in this field will respond to the nutrients recycled from the wasted hay and manure.
· Once rain replenishes the soil and plants start growing again, move cattle to new pasture once that pasture reaches 8 to 10 inches in height or greater
· Inventory hay and pasture supplies now to ensure there is adequate forage for fall grazing and sufficient hay to make it through the winter
· If you need to haul water you can use caged water tanks from chemical and food industry – be sure to read the label on the container and only use these containers if you know they were used for food

“Farmers should dust off their drought management plans. If need be, balance off the herd by selling those animals ready for market. We do not want farmers to lose or have to sell underweight animals,” said WVU Extension Specialist Edward Rayburn. Farmers should report drought conditions or any livestock deaths to their local Farm Service Agency Office.


The West Virginia Department of Agriculture protects plant, animal and human health through a variety of scientific, regulatory and consumer protection programs. The Commissioner of Agriculture is one of six statewide elected officials who sits on the Board of Public Works.

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