

Feed budgeting in a drought

Creating a feed budget can be a difficult and daunting task for many producers. The following points are to help you understand the basic information you may need to create an accurate feed budget during a drought.

By not doing a feed budget for your farm you run the risk of inadequately feeding animals to their requirements, running out of feed or not knowing how much it will cost you to feed your livestock for an extended period. You may be better off selling them and in some scenarios feed costs can take years to recoup and be crippling for a farm business.

Paddock feed

- Assess pasture dry matter availability
- Understand the Neutral Detergent Fibre (NDF) values of pasture and how these may restrict intakes in mature dry pasture
- Assess the quality of the pasture (amount of green, dead matter, grass or legume component) which will determine the class of livestock it may support. Get a feed analysis if you are unsure.
- If no paddock feed is available is confinement feeding an option

Livestock

- Condition score of the livestock (current and targets)
- Class of livestock (adult, young/growing, dry, lactating)
- What you want to do with the class of stock (finish, grow, maintain)
- Draft or group into weight ranges or feed requirements (young animals, light and heavy)
- What will be carried over and what will be sold during the feeding period

Feed requirements

- What are the intakes of the various classes of livestock
- What are the protein, energy, fibre and mineral requirements
- What are the number of animals that will be fed in each class of stock
- How long will they need to be fed for accounting for the autumn period/a late break
- Will I need to fully hand feed or supplementary feed

Feeds on hand

- What hay or grain reserves are in stock on my farm
- What additional feed sources do I have (failed crops, rejected grain/screenings)
- What alternative feeds are available that can be locally sourced
- What is the nutritive value of the feeds I have on hand. Ideally use a feed analysis or as an alternative you can use average feed values from published feed tables. It is important to consider that drought affected crops may have vastly different feed values compared to the same feed produced in an average year.
- Compare feeds based on energy and protein in their dry matter form (grain is often the cheapest sourced of energy in comparison to hay during a drought)
- What infrastructure is needed to feed out on farm and what storage facilities do I have on farm particularly when purchasing feeds that are not normally used.

For further feed budgeting information in a drought refer to the following budgeting scenarios:

1. Dry Matter vs As Fed
2. Calculating Dry Matter Intakes for Various Classes of Stock
3. Basic Ration / Diet Formulation
4. Ration Formulation using the 'Pearson Square'
5. Comparing the Costs of Feed
6. Calculating Supplementary Feeding amounts
 - Total Daily Requirements for various classes of Cattle
 - Total Daily Requirements to maintain sheep

For more information about managing livestock in a drought:

Feeding and Managing Sheep in Dry Times
Department of Agriculture, and Australian Wool Innovation
(Bulletin 4697 November 2006)

<https://www.wool.com/globalassets/start/on-farm-research-and-development/sheep-health-welfare-and-productivity/sheep-nutrition/awi-drought-resources/bulletinfeedingsheep2006.pdf>

Drought Feeding and Management of Beef Cattle, a guide for farmers and land managers
Victorian Department of Primary Industries & MLA 2007
(ISBN 978 -1-741 99-0355-5 online)

http://agriculture.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/266093/20070320-Drought-Feeding-of-Beef-cattle-for-the-web-FINAL.pdf

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