

South Dakota Rancher®

Management tips for South Dakota livestock and grassland managers

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Salvaging Forage From Drought Stressed Wheat

The central and western parts of the state are experiencing yet another dry spring. With the lack of rain it is likely that most wheat crops in this area will not produce much or any grain this year. However, drought stressed wheat can make some great grazing or hay for livestock if managed appropriately.



Drought stressed winter wheat. Photo: Cropquest.

Grazing drought stressed wheat is a good source of high quality feed for lactating cows or growing cattle. Grazing these fields can also reduce early-season grazing pressure on pastures, which undoubtedly also are suffering from drought stress. Giving grass pastures that extra rest in the spring will allow the limited soil moisture to be used efficiently and produce as much grass as possible for later in the grazing season.

Before turning cattle out on drought stressed wheat, it is critical that the forage be tested for nitrates. Providing grazing livestock with magnesium supplementation while they are on wheat fields also is recommended to avoid grass staggers (tetany) that may accompany a swift diet change to lush, green growing forages.

Making hay out of drought stressed wheat fields also is a possibility. The best time to cut is at your earliest convenience. Cutting early will make a higher quality hay, but cutting later will provide more yield. Be sure to check drought stressed wheat hay for nitrates before feeding to livestock.

Before making decisions on what to do with your wheat this spring, be sure to consult with your insurance company to determine the reduction in payout if wheat is grazed or hayed.

Pasture Weed Control

Late spring and early summer is a great time to control both annual and perennial pasture weeds. Many of us tend to wait until weeds become noticeable in a pasture before we decide to spray. Often times, however, when weeds are noticeable, it is too late to do anything productive about them.

Annual broadleaf weeds can be controlled effectively by 2,4-D ester or Ally.

To control more persistent weeds, including most perennials like western ragweed, vervain, ironweed, and broom snakeweed, Tordon will work well and its soil residual activity will limit new seedlings of these undesirable weeds.



Photo: Barry Dunn

Grazon, a mix of Tordon and 2,4-D is another effective herbicide to control these more persistent weeds.

Woody plants that create problems can be effectively controlled with Tordon, Spike, and Milestone on pastures and rangeland.

The most effective weed management tool we have is grazing management. No amount of herbicide will eradicate weed problems from range and pasture if improper grazing management is a persistent problem. Allowing livestock to keep desirable forage species grazed off throughout the spring and summer gives every competitive advantage to these types of weed species. With no grass competition, weeds get better access to light, soil moisture, and soil nutrients, making them even more difficult to control.

Droughty conditions only compound problems as a short forage supply increases excessive grazing. So, before you load up the sprayer tank this spring and summer, make sure you have a good grazing management in place to help make herbicides as effective as possible.