

Agriculture News

Dallam and Hartley Counties

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The 2014 Farm Bill contains significant changes to the farm safety net that include new options for producers. It will be important that growers educate themselves on all the facts in order to make informed risk management decisions that best suit their option.

As an initial look at these new provisions, the Ag and Food Policy Center, Texas A&M Agrilife Extension, and the Southwest Council of Agribusiness have teamed up to put together an info session to give those involved in the agriculture industry insight on some of the changes headed there way.

Come and Join Us:

Friday, March 21, 2014
8:30 am—12 pm
Amarillo Civic Center—Regency Room B
401 S. Buchanan St, Amarillo, TX, 79101

- 8:30—9:00 Coffee and doughnuts
- 9:00—9:15 Welcome and Special Introductions
– *Hon. Larry Combest, Former Chairman, House Agriculture Committee*
- 9:15—10:15 Understanding the Farm Safety Net
– *Dr. Joe Outlaw: Director, Agriculture and Food Policy Center*
- 10:15—10:30 Break
- 10:30—11:40 Q&A with Dr. Outlaw and regional commodity representatives
- 11:40—Noon “Perspectives on the 2014 Farm Bill
– *Tom Sell: Combest, Sell and Associates*

Mike Bragg
Dallam & Hartley County
CEA-Agriculture and National Resources

Kay Rogers
Dallam & Hartley County
CEA-Family and Consumer Sciences

Shelby Campbell
Dallam & Hartley County
CEA-4-H & Youth Development

Janet Harrison
Dallam & Hartley County
Program Assistant

Marsha Hightower
Dallam & Hartley County
Administrative Assistant

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Rangeland Management is Key to Surviving the Drought

Improved management adapted to changing rangeland conditions will be a key to surviving three back-to-back years of drought, according to Tim Steffens, Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Service rangeland management specialist in Canyon.

“We have just had three of the direst growing seasons in recorded history in a row,” said Steffens, who is also a West Texas A&M University assistant professor, spoke at the recent Panhandle Ranch Management event. “We’ve had one of the driest falls, We’ve had one of the driest winters.

“So this coming year, don’t be in any hurry to increase numbers until we find out for sure how much rain we’ve got, and how much grass we’re going to have that can respond to further rain showers later in the year.”

Steffens warned that if grass starts in bad shape from last year, it will probably remain in trouble this year, even if it rains normally.

“If we don’t get rain in the spring to get things started and have some grass growing by mid-June, it’s probably not going to be a good year. So by early July, you will need to assess the conditions and make decisions then. Then look again in the fall and determine if you have enough grass and if you have had enough rain to take care of the grass.

Steffens said keys to management include providing adequate recovery for grass before grazing, which means letting the plant get a full complement of leaves before cattle regrow a plant.

A grazing “system” that does not provide adequate recovery following grazing won’t do much good, he said. Whatever management strategy a rancher chooses, adequate recovery for severely defoliated plants and leaving enough residue after a grazing period “is what is going to get you where you want to go.”

Steffens said grazing decisions can prepare resources to respond favorably in the good times or not go down so far when things are not good.

“Right now, I am not worried about weeds,” he said. “if it will grow, I’m tickled to death. Get something to cover up that ground, provide some shade, pro-

tect it from the wind, keep it from eroding and provide some cover so that something will grow later.”

A few other items on his management list include:

- Provide adequate regrowth for heavily defoliated plants, and do that every year, if possible.
- Improve distribution– get the animals away from the places they are overusing and get them to places they are underusing.
- Provide every opportunity for recruitment of new plants. Most plants in pastures reproduce vegetatively: they don’t have to come up from seed. But some areas may need more seed. “If you have to have the seed, try to get some. But I wouldn’t advise going out there and wasting money now trying to plant.”
- Maintain stocking rate within carrying capacity. “If you are overstocked, I don’t care what you do, you are a numerical failure going in.”
- Maintain or improve resilience of the plant community. A variety of plants in unstable conditions is a positive thing: there’s always something there to respond to rain.

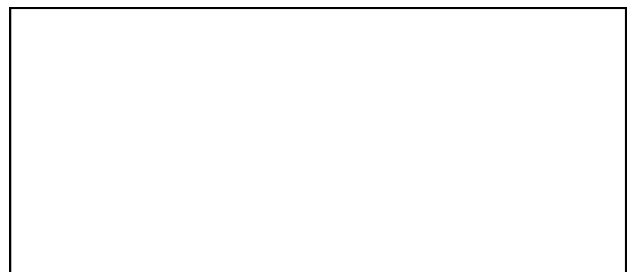
Steffens said feeding hay on rangeland does not stop overgrazing, because if any grass does grow, cattle will go to it before eating the hay.

“Get cattle out of abused areas and to areas that still have feed,” he said. “if you have to continue to feed cattle, I suggest getting them into a pen and feeding them there, where they won’t be overgrazing plants.”

He said “planting fence posts and pipe” or dividing up pastures and allowing periods of rest for the grass may be more cost effective than planting or buying hay.

-Writer: Kay Ledbetter, skledbetter@ag.tamu.edu

-Contact Tim Steffens, tsteffens@wtamu.edu





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Dallam & Hartley Counties
Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service
401 Denrock, Dalhart, TX 79022
Tel. 806.244.4434 | Fax. 806.244.7434 | dallam@ag.tamu.edu

Dallam and Hartley Counties
Extension Office
401 Denrock
Dalhart, TX, 79022
Phone: 806-244-4434
Fax: 806-244-7434

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If you would like for us to send you information via e-mail, please send your e-mail

address to me at:

marsha.hightower@ag.tamu.edu