

Dry times and late seasonal breaks

Management for graziers

Dry times and late seasonal breaks can have a devastating impact on livestock businesses. Making decisions in tough times is challenging and it's important to plan effective strategies. The plan and decisions individual farm businesses make will vary depending on individual circumstances.

The Hills and Fleurieu region has regular dry times and frequent late breaks. Planning for this seasonal variability supports better decision-making and can reduce stress.



Considerations for your dry times plan:

- Be prepared with a plan that includes clear objectives, timelines and measurable targets where possible.
- Involve everyone in the business in decision-making and identify actions for both dry periods and recovery.
- Seek advice, build a support network and consider the costs, benefits and time required for strategies such as feeding, selling or agisting livestock.
- A lean dry times plan should support livestock welfare, business viability and the protection of on-farm resources to aid recovery.

Key principles for dry times

- Develop a dry times plan with clear triggers.
- Monitor Feed on Offer (FOO), livestock condition and groundcover.
- Protect productive paddocks and maintain groundcover.
- Identify livestock to retain, sell or agist.
- Secure feed reserves and budget for supplementation.
- Maintain animal health and nutrition.
- Build long-term drought resilience.
- Plan recovery before conditions improve.

Short-term strategies

- If prolonged feeding is required, selling livestock is often more economical than purchasing feed. Prioritise retaining core breeder numbers.
- Protect your most productive paddocks by maintaining minimum groundcover and avoiding overgrazing.
- Regularly monitor livestock condition and pasture availability.
- Ensure adequate feed reserves for the lean period and into autumn and winter.
- Nutritional stress increases the risk of health issues, including worms.
- Maintain clostridial vaccinations, particularly when stock are stressed and grazing close to the soil surface.
- Consider vitamin A and E supplementation during extended periods without green feed.
- When feeding high levels of cereal grain, supplement calcium and sodium.
- Consider early weaning to reduce feed demand and support breeder recovery. Wean calves by six months and lambs by 12 weeks, or earlier if required.

Longer term strategies

- Explore opportunities arising from lean times, such as changing breeds, adjusting enterprise mix, or shifting from breeding to trading stock.
- Address soil constraints that limit plant access to moisture, including pH and trace element imbalances.
- Review and consider drought-tolerant pasture species, including summer-active native grasses, brassicas and chicory, and winter-active perennial pastures.

Monitoring Feed on Offer (FOO)

Use feed budgeting and seasonal planning to estimate future feed availability and support timely stocking decisions.

A pasture ruler provides a simple, objective way to estimate Feed on Offer (FOO) by measuring pasture height, with many rulers converting height to kilograms of dry matter per hectare (kg DM/ha).

Monitoring FOO helps inform grazing and stocking decisions before pastures are overgrazed, maintaining groundcover and supporting pasture recovery. With experience, familiar references such as boot height can also provide a practical guide to pasture levels.

Seek professional advice

Seeking advice early is advised. Technical advice may be available from veterinarians, agronomists, livestock consultants, nutritionists, rural merchandise advisers, and other agricultural professionals who understand local farming systems. Discussing options with trusted advisers can help assess feeding strategies, animal health risks, stocking decisions and business impacts.

Dry periods can also place significant pressure on personal and family wellbeing. Access free and confidential support through the Family and Business (FaB) Mentor Program, which connects farmers with experienced mentors, and links people to other support services. Visit: pir.sa.gov.au/fab-mentors

Further resources

For further tools, resources and support visit hf.landscape.sa.gov.au/DryTimes



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