Truckloads of cattle selling at auction barn

Most summers, producers bring truckloads of cattle to Gothenburg Livestock every other Wednesday to sell in the auction ring.

This summer, with little or no rain and temperatures in the 100s day after day, the sale barn has had a sale weekly.

“It’s pasture conditions,” said Wendell Brott, co-owner of Gothenburg Livestock and an auctioneer and cattle producer. “And the hay supply is so short that they’re getting rid of anything they don’t need.”

Just last Wednesday, Brott said the business sold 700 head of cattle, compared to a couple of hundred during normal summers.

Open cows, or those without calves, and feeder cattle are typically what ranchers are selling.

Because pastures are burning up, he said cattle owners are trying to hold onto the good producers and auctioning off any excess livestock.

“Guys are talking about selling cattle in July that they normally sell in August and September,” he said.

Despite the glut in livestock rings this time of year, Brott said cattle prices are still good.

Brott said he's seen dry conditions before but probably not as drastic as this year.

What worries him is the fact that the area had little moisture last winter.

"We can usually make it through a summer like this with grazing but there's no submoisture this year," he said. "We're suffering right now."

What grass cattle are eating, is bit to the ground so there's no regrowth, Brott said.

With short hay supplies, ethanol plants cutting back or closing and no grass in the hills, he said "it's going to be a challenging year."

Because cattle in feedlots are more sensitive to heat than humans, they are in an emergency heat stress category through Thursday.

Experts say that air flow and water are key in minimizing death.

Heat and lack of soil moisture are also negatively affecting dryland corn, according to Allen Core, a University of Nebraska-Lincoln extension educator who is based in Dawson County.

"We're seeing anything from barren ears to at least 30% yield loss in the area," Core said.

Travis and Ginny Peterson, who raise both dryland and irrigated corn and raise livestock north of Gothenburg, said the situation for dryland corn is dire.

With no rain in the forecast this week, Travis said he thinks dryland farmers are done and hopefully have insurance.

He estimated that about 30% of the corn crop around Gothenburg is not irrigated.

With pivots and irrigation pipes going full tilt the last few weeks, Travis offered this philosophy about the method.

“Irrigation is supposed to help grow a crop,” he said. “It’s not supposed to entirely grow a crop.”

Total reliance on irrigation will likely continue with the heat wave not expected to dissipate for awhile.

National Weather Service forecasters have issued a heat advisory through Thursday as temperatures are expected to climb into the upper 90s to lower 100s.

Heat, combined with humidity, are expected to result in heat indices of 100 or higher each day for most of the week.

On Monday, Gov. Dave Heineman declared a state of emergency throughout the state because of drought conditions.

The declaration allows state personnel and resources to assist with emergency situations and prevention and allows maximum flexibility to deploy Nebraska National Guard and Nebraska Emergency Management Agency assets and resources as needed.

Roadside haying will be allowed July 15-30 in 55 counties, including Dawson.

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