

## Heads-up on drought issues

By Roy Burris

Severe drought and hot weather will likely increase the questions concerning cattle and cattle feeds. Here are a few reminders that might be beneficial.

- (1) Beware of poisonous plants. Drought and hot weather increase the likelihood of cattle consuming poisonous plants. Several poisonous plants, like perilla mint aren't normally consumed by cattle but since they grow in the shade where cattle are spending most of their time, cattle might now consume them. My suggestion is to take hay to these areas where cattle congregate so they won't be as tempted to consume any "unusual" plants.
- (2) Keep water and shade available, of course. Don't just assume that automatic waterers are working. Check them frequently.
- (3) Early weaning of calves might be beneficial to minimize the nutrient needs of spring-calving cows. Calves can be fed to make efficient gains and sold as heavier, weaned calves.
- (4) Alternative feeds will be an option to decrease feed costs...so don't be surprised at what folks will consider feeding. Check with Dr. Lehmkuhler or me if you have questions.
- (5) NITRATE POISONING is a real possibility. That is one of nature's cruel tricks...folks are trying to salvage corn crop disasters but toxic nitrate levels are definite possibilities. Drought, heat, stunting and high fertility levels mean that increased nitrate levels are likely. Nitrate levels should be assessed before proceeding to salvage the corn crop. Corn plants with high nitrate levels should not be grazed, fed as green chop or cut for hay. Nitrate levels will not decrease in hay during storage. Ensiling can be a viable option since about 40 to 60 percent of nitrate is lost during fermentation but check for nitrate since extremely high levels might be difficult to overcome. Don't feed the silage until it has had about 3 weeks to become fully ensiled. Cattle may become accustomed to low levels of nitrate if they are gradually adjusted to them.
- (6) Cattle producers must keep an eye on their feed stocks for winter feeding. Many people had lower hay yields this spring and feeding now will likely decrease their hay reserves. They might consider purchasing feed now before prices get higher.