Decision Tree: **Managing Forage During Drought**

KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

- **Cost vs. Benefit:** Evaluate the cost of different management strategies and their benefits.
- **Animal Health:** Prioritize the health and well-being of livestock in all decisions.
- **Sustainability:** Consider long-term sustainability and resilience of forage systems.

By following this decision tree, you can systematically address the challenges posed by drought conditions and make informed decisions to optimize forage management and ensure the sustainability of your livestock operation.

STEP 01

Assess Drought Severity and Forage Availability

- **Mild Drought:** Forage growth is slightly reduced; reserves are adequate.
- **Moderate Drought:** Significant reduction in forage growth; reserves are beginning to deplete.
- **Severe Drought:** Very limited forage growth; reserves are critically low.

STEP 02

Evaluate Current Forage Supply

- **Adequate Supply:** Sufficient forage to meet current needs.
- **Limited Supply:** Forage supply is lower than needed.
- **Critical Supply:** Forage supply is insufficient to meet needs.

OPTIONS FOR FORAGE MANAGEMENT

For Adequate Supply:

- **Maintain Regular Management:** Continue normal grazing practices with some monitoring.
- **Implement Rotational Grazing:** Use rotational grazing to optimize forage use and allow rest periods.

For Limited Supply:

- **Supplemental Feeding:** Introduce supplemental feeds to bridge the gap between available forage and livestock needs.
- **Adjust Stocking Rates:** Reduce the number of animals to match the available forage supply. Consider early weaning, culling older or unproductive (open) stock.
- **Conserve Forage:** Reduce feed waste, analyze forage supplies and allocate highest quality to late gestation/lactating group. Consider removing stock off pastures and confinement feeding or implement rotational grazing system.

For Critical Supply:

- **Emergency Feeding Plan:** Develop a comprehensive feeding strategy that includes purchased feed or alternative forages.
- **Reduce Herd Size:** Consider selling or culling some animals to match the reduced forage availability.

STEP 03

Implement Water Management Strategies

- **Adequate Water Supply:** Ensure access to clean, sufficient water sources.
- **Limited Water Supply:** Implement water conservation measures and manage water distribution efficiently.
- **Critical Water Supply:** Prioritize water usage and explore alternative water sources, storage or delivery methods.

STEP 04

Monitor and Adjust Strategies

- **Regular Monitoring:** Continuously assess forage conditions, animal health, and water availability.
- **Adjust Management Practices:** Modify feeding, grazing, and water management practices as needed based on evolving conditions.

STEP 05

Long-Term Planning

- **Develop Drought-Resilient Forage Systems:** Invest in drought-resistant forage varieties and soil conservation practices.
- **Build Forage Reserves:** Increase forage reserves and storage capacity to prepare for future droughts.
- **Improve water quality and quantity:** Adjust on-farm practices to ensure water conservation and water quality best practices are implemented and review/revise water infrastructure and delivery systems.

For more information, refer to the BC Ministry of Agriculture and Food Drought in Agriculture Website and Livestock Drought Management Guidebook:
https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/industry/agriculture-seafood/agricultural-land-and-environment/water/drought-in-agriculture

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