

Ensure your contingency plans are in place

Farmers are accountable for the welfare of their livestock at all times. The animals should never have to suffer because of poor planning.

Livestock farmers should factor into their management plan the correct action to take in case of drought, according to a press release by the Livestock Welfare Coordinating Committee. For livestock to die as a result of starvation is totally unacceptable; it is a slow, agonising death that is entirely avoidable.

Three options are available in the event of prolonged drought: feed, sell or slaughter. If no improvement in the situation appears likely in the short term, take immediate action. Doing nothing, and thus allowing the animals to starve, should be avoided at all costs.

The following should be considered:

- Use money obtained from livestock sales to buy feed for the remaining animals, and eventually to buy livestock when the drought eases.
- Reduce livestock numbers. This will ensure that you spend less on supplements overall, so that you can buy better supplements for the remaining livestock.
- Avoid delaying the culling of an animal deprived of food. This may render its meat unsuitable for human consumption.
- Avoid overstocking drought-stricken farms with hungry animals. This will force them to graze very aggressively, ruining

RIGHT:
In a prolonged drought, a livestock farmer can either feed, sell or slaughter the animals. Allowing them to die slowly of starvation is unacceptable.

FW ARCHIVE



pastures and veld. Overstocking also increases the likelihood of hungry, desperate livestock ingesting poisonous plants.

- Avoid the economic consequences of hunger. Starved animals will not grow or reproduce adequately and their offspring are likely to be permanently stunted and unproductive. Undernourished livestock are also far more susceptible to diseases and parasites.
- It is ethically unacceptable to allow animals to starve slowly to death.

PLAN AHEAD

Implement your contingency plans in stages as the drought becomes more critical. The following steps are recommended:

- Sell older animals that will struggle during a drought and will most likely not make it through the winter in poorer condition.
- Wean calves, lambs or kids as far as possible, even

if lighter than normal, and assist small weanlings that are not immediately marketable.

- Keep core livestock that will be needed to rebuild the herd later and remove all non-breeding livestock from the grazing.
- When the condition of livestock has deteriorated to the point that they are not marketable, end their suffering humanely. Do not allow them to linger and then die.
- Accumulate a reserve of at least six months' feed in the form of hay, silage, or conserved grazing.

The end of a drought does not mean the end of its consequences. What follows is often termed a 'green drought', where pastures become green but are scanty and fragile. They should be given ample time to recover. Remember, too, that economic recovery after the drought will be slow and expensive.

- Contact the RPO on 012 349 1102 or at rpo@lantic.net.

This page is sponsored by the red meat industry

