

Weather forecasts are used every day to help people all over the world prepare for the various types of weather that may be headed their way. While weather forecasts are most commonly used to help make weekend or other short term plans, they may also prove to be beneficial when making long term plans. A long range weather forecast is a great tool for cattle producers that have management decisions to make that will come to fruition in the months to come. This week we will explain how a long term weather forecast can provide information that assists in decision making, and how this can impact an operation.

It is important to be aware of the negative impact that cold, wet weather can have on cattle. Extended periods of cold weather like we have been experiencing can be especially hard on the cattle in our region. Not only are the cattle not as cold-tolerant, but their nutritional requirements are also negatively affected by the cold weather. Studies show that in a cow that is in moderate body condition her energy requirements increase 1% for every one degree Fahrenheit the temperature is below 30°. Wind chill and wet conditions further increase the cow's nutrition requirements. The increase in requirements is a result of the cattle using fat reserves as energy sources to help insulate them from the cold. This explains why it is important for the cattle to be in a body condition of 5 or higher throughout times of cold, wet weather. These adequately conditioned cattle are better able to handle the cold stress compared to thin cows, and are more likely to be reproductively healthy than poor conditioned cattle.

This is just one example of how a long range weather forecast can help a producer. If he/she knew that cold, wet weather was expected they could better prepare their cattle for winter months by making sure they are in adequate body condition. They can also be well prepared by making a plan for what and how much will need to be fed throughout winter so that the cattle will maintain that adequate body condition.

Though long range forecasts are helpful for making winter feeding decisions, they can also be beneficial in planning for the summer months. If you go into the warm seasons with the expectation of baling a certain amount of hay for your cattle, it is wise to first look at the long range forecast for those months. Does the weather projection show that the weather is expected to be conducive to hay baling? If not, you may want to develop a backup plan. This plan may consist of purchasing hay from previous years, which may prove to be less expensive than if you were to purchase newer hay. Although older hay is usually lower in quality, purchasing at the beginning of spring is good insurance, as it guarantees that you will have hay to feed your cattle when winter comes.

Although there is no certain way to know exactly what the weather is going to be like in the future, long range weather forecasts help to give producers a good idea of what to expect. Based on these long range projections, a producer may develop a management plan that will help to prepare the cattle for whatever weather conditions are expected to come. If you have any questions about preparing your cattle or operation for extreme weather conditions, please contact us.

Thanks,

Dr. Jesse Richardson, DVM