

# Fight the drought

**Our country has not seen a lot of rain lately. In fact, most parts of South Africa have not had sufficient or any rain since September last year. Farmers who own livestock know that they are entering a very dry winter with little roughage to feed their animals. All farmers also know that it is a very drastic and emotional decision to get rid of one's livestock because of drought. For a small dairy farmer, the loss of cows can also mean a loss of income and milk for the household.**

But there are a few ways in which farmers can successfully survive the winter drought. Here are a few tips:

- First off, make a list of the amount of feed and water that you have available on your farm. Now work out how much you will need every day to see your cows through until the next rains come.
- If you have many cows, make a list of how many there are. Then divide them into groups, to give you a clear picture of their condition. Put the cows giving the most milk into one group and the cows giving less milk, into another group. The cows that are dry must be in a separate group.
- Also divide your heifers into groups – which are replacement heifers and which are not. Now count all the cows and heifers in each of these groups.
- Plan how you will irrigate your pasture. Do not water too much and do not waste any water.
- Talk to someone who knows about feed and discuss a feeding strategy with that person. You can talk to your area extension officer or even ask for the advice of your local co-op.
- Work out how much feed you have available and how much you will need to buy. Try not to buy unnecessary feed and make sure of what is available and what not.



- Do not mix chicken manure into your dry cows' feed during the last three weeks before calving. It can cause lacteal (milk) fever.
- Calculate how much milk your cows will be able to produce with the amount of feed that you have available.
- Always keep track of how much money you have available to live off and how much debt you have, if any.
- Do not lose faith. Remember that it will rain again.

### Getting rid of livestock

While no farmer wants to get rid of his livestock, some may have no other choice. If you have to sell some cows, then first get rid of those that are not important for your income or household survival. Keep the cows that are the most productive and feed them well.

### How to stretch cow feed

If you have enough money, then you can buy so-called silage extenders to stretch the roughage that you feed to your cows. Remember to feed the best quality that you can afford.

### The importance of water

Water is a very important source of life both for your family and for your livestock. Save as much water as you can by not using too much when irrigating and by making better use of your household water. Read the article on how to save water in this *Ubisi Mail*, for some handy tips. **UM**