

NDSU Extension provides outlook for the 2025 grazing and haying season

Regardless of spring conditions, have a drought plan in place

NDSU EXTENSION

This winter has been similar to last winter in terms of snow and potential moisture for this spring. Much of the state received below-average fall and winter precipitation, leading to below-average soil moisture. Currently, 55% of the state is experiencing some level of drought, and an additional 12% is abnormally dry.

The western North Dakota forage and grazing outlook differs significantly from central and northeastern North Dakota, according to Kevin Sedivec, NDSU rangeland management specialist.

A forage and grazing outlook for 2025 is based on the previous fall’s moisture and moisture received in May and June. Although snow is important for refreshing water sources, snow only adds about 25% of the total moisture for plant growth in most years. Because the ground is usually frozen when snow melts, most of the moisture flows overland into water bodies.

Spring rain is still the most important moisture for overall forage production. Precipitation in April through June drives forage production in North Dakota. Due to the dominance of cool-season grasses, rains during this period are responsible for more than 80% of forage production in the state.

In 2024, the majority of the state received precipitation through the end of June, resulting in good forage production. However, as the summer progressed, drought conditions emerged in western North Dakota, while the central and northeast regions of the state received above-average moisture.

The 2025 forage outlook starts with 2024 fall moisture. Cool-season grasses,

which make up over 95% of grass hay and 70% to 80% of pasture forage in North Dakota, develop new tillers in September and October that become the first growth in the spring. The absence of fall tillers can delay spring green-up by up to two weeks and impact overall forage production by 25% to 50%.

Tillers that develop in the spring come from buds that break dormancy in the spring, usually when soil temperatures stay about 40 degrees Fahrenheit for three or more days. The tillers established in the fall will grow when temperatures reach 32 degrees for five consecutive days.

Impacts of fall moisture

According to Sedivec, fall moisture in North Dakota was extremely variable across the state, with about 80% of the state receiving 10% to 60% of normal precipitation. Only the northcentral and northeastern regions of North Dakota received at or greater than 100% of average precipitation in September and October. Areas that received fall moisture would have experienced fall growth and tiller development. However, most of the state had low fall tiller development, setting up much of the state to have a below-normal forage production year.

The western third of North Dakota was and still is in a severe-to-extreme drought, with the entire southern region of the state and most of Minnesota in a moderate drought. Confounding the fall moisture shortage in these regions, the western and southern regions of the state will likely have a below-normal outlook for both hay and grazing forage this year, Sedivec predicts.

Impacts of fall grazing management

Although areas of the state had good fall tiller production, fall and winter grazing management can override this benefit. If these tillers are eaten or die due to drought, then spring growth must occur from new tillers developed in April and May.

Heavy grazing during the fall and/or winter, resulting in the removal of the growing point (between the bottom two leaves) from tillers, will cause additional stress and tiller mortality. In the event of high fall tiller mortality, grasses will need to develop a new tiller in the spring, delaying growth by two to three weeks.

Heavy grazing use in the fall not only delays growth but causes reductions in overall plant growth and forage production. Data collected by NDSU Extension found that severe grazing use, (greater than 80% removal of available forage) reduces growth of cool-season grasses and forage production. Forage production was reduced by as much as 57% on sites evaluated as having severe grazing use the previous fall.

“If you grazed your tillers short last fall or during the winter months,” says Miranda Meehan, NDSU

livestock environmental stewardship specialist, “expect a delay in green-up and forage production in 2025. Plan to defer these pastures from grazing in the spring of 2025.”

Plan for the 2025 grazing season

NDSU Extension developed the following scenarios based on spring precipitation and management:

If spring precipitation is normal and you received near-normal fall moisture and no overgrazing occurred in the fall, expect a normal turn-out date for grazing with normal pasture and hay production.

If spring precipitation is normal, but the plants didn’t produce many fall tillers (such as in the western third and south half North Dakota and most of Minnesota), expect a delay in plant development and lower production due to a loss in tiller development due. Further reductions will occur if pastures were grazed heavily in the fall.

If spring precipitation is 130% or more above normal, expect normal-to-above-normal forage production in the eastern two-thirds of North Dakota and Minnesota. However, the areas impacted by severe drought will likely experience below-

normal production in 2025 unless precipitation is above 150% of normal.

If spring precipitation is normal-to-below-normal, expect reduced forage production and a decline in forage quality earlier in the season for much of North Dakota and Minnesota.

Regardless of spring precipitation, to prevent reductions in plant health and production, pasture turnout should occur when the dominant forage species in a pasture reach grazing readiness. Grazing readiness for most domesticated pastures, such as smooth brome, crested wheatgrass and orchardgrass, is at the three-leaf stage, whereas grazing readiness for most native range grasses is the three-and-a-half-leaf stage. For more information on evaluating grazing readiness contact your local NDSU Extension agent or refer to [ndsu.ag/grazing-2025](#).

“When production is low due to delayed tiller development,” says Meehan, “it becomes easy to run out of forage quickly if you go to full stock too early, leading to overuse.”

This overuse during early green-up leads to reduced plant vigor and reduced leaf area, impacting photosynthesis and reducing food (carbohydrate) stored in roots:

“In the end, you may sacrifice 45% to 60% of forage production for the year by grazing too early.”

Timely precipitation is critical to forage growth and production. Equally critical is the use of management practices that maintain healthy, vigorous plant communities that can withstand disturbances.

Regardless of what spring brings, NDSU Extension recommends having a drought plan in place with well-defined trigger dates.

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EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

The Adams County Highway Department is accepting applications for a full-time Maintenance Worker.

This is a safety-sensitive position. Applicants applying must sign the Drug Testing Release form (SFN 50098). Current and previous employers (within past two years) may be contacted. This position will be based out of the Adams County Shop in Hettinger, ND. Willing to train the right applicant!

The job description and the application may be obtained online at www.adamscountynynd.com or picked up and returned to the Adams County Shop at 102 2nd Ave NE, Hettinger, ND 58639. Full benefit package including retirement. 100% single health policy paid. Starting wage: DOE. Positions will be open until filled. Feel free to call the office at 701-567-2235 or Road Superintendent Justin Blade at 701-567-3376 with any questions.

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Happy 102 Birthday to Dorothy Vliem on April 2!

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CALL FOR BIDS

MOWING OF CITY OWNED LOTS CITY OF HETTINGER, NORTH DAKOTA

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN, that the Hettinger City Council will receive bids for mowing and trimming of city owned lots and Hettinger Housing Authority for 2025.

All bids must be submitted to the City Auditor’s Office in a sealed envelope marked “City of Hettinger- Mowing Bid”, on or before April 7th, 2025. Bids will be opened at 7:30 AM, April 9th, 2025 at the Hettinger Armory Conference Room.

Interested parties may contact the City Auditor Office to obtain a copy of the Bid Form.

The City Council reserves the right to reject any or all bids.

BY ORDER OF THE HETTINGER CITY COUNCIL.
Krista Faller, City Auditor