

Feeding Through Drought in Montana Supplementing vs Dry Lotting

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- 1) When grass is green and growing in the spring, summer and fall, use the take half/leave half rule and shoot for 50% or less utilization to encourage continued root growth and forage production. Rotate pastures prior to 50% utilization.
- 2) When grazing dormant pastures, there are three trigger points that tell you when to move:
 - A) When you reach a 70-80% utilization average across grass varieties and parts of the pasture.
 - B) When grass stubble height has fallen to two inches.
 - C) If you can see 50% soil when you look straight down with no rocks, rooted vegetation or loose litter, you have dropped below 50% cover.
- 3) Once you reached any of the above thresholds in pasture, pastures should not be grazed anymore even when dormant.
- 4) Once all pastures have reached any of these thresholds, it is more efficient to dry lot ewes and protect range resources.
 - A) Spring bunch grass growth depends on buds formed in the fall. If fall grazing is too severe, you will get almost no spring growth even if precipitation is good.
 - C) Once you drop below 50% cover, wind erosion accelerates and pastures have difficulty recovering during rain events.
 - D) These are not grazing goals to shoot for, but critical thresholds you should not cross to protect range for future generations.
- 5) If hay or other harvested feed is lacking to properly dry lot sheep, you will seriously need to consider selling some or all your stock. Selling older stock first, sending ewe lambs to a feedlot for the winter and ultra-sounding for pregnancy are good management tools to reduce pressure on range resources through the fall and winter and reduce feed needs for dry lotting on the ranch.
- 6) A great resource out of Australia on this topic and drought management in general for sheep can be found at: <https://www.feedinglivestock.vic.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Sheep-drought-feeding-guide.pdf>

