

Drought continues to spread across the western U.S. this spring. The Pacific Northwest, and Northern California are showing increasingly worse conditions. This week just over 28% of the U.S. showed any state of drought on a scale of D0 to D4. Classifications are listed in graphics. Compared to the same week last year, categories of D2-D4 are up to 5.65% of the continental U.S. compared to only a quarter of a percent last year. This figure jumped a full percent last week, nationally.

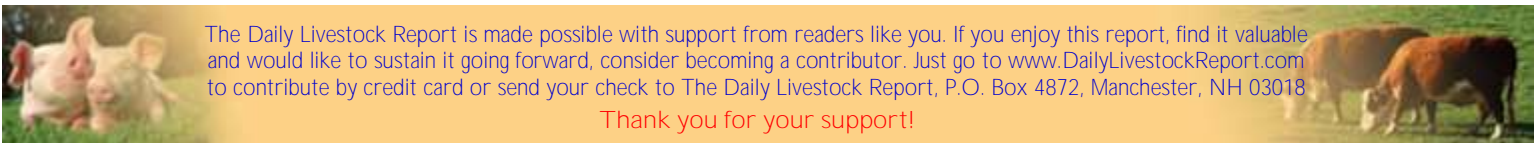
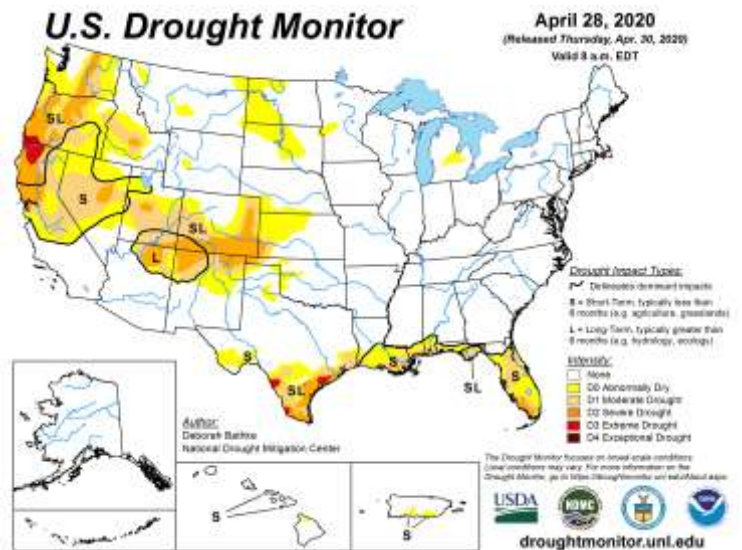
The graphic above shows the U.S. Drought Monitor West Region. The data points to a 1% increase in drought intensity for this region in the D2-D4 categories from last week, and the prior week had jumped 3% over the weekend 4/17/2020. Northern California is showing broadening signs of Extreme Drought (D3) and intensifying conditions in the West.

The drought monitor will become increasingly important as we start to analyze pasture and range conditions this spring. The first pasture and range report is usually released the Monday of the first full week of May in the USDA-NASS crop progress report and will continue to be reported weekly through the end of October. USDA also maps estimated cattle (using 2012 Census data) in [drought areas](#),

updated weekly with the latest Drought Monitor figures.

With smaller numbers of cattle placed into feedlots, more are ending up on pasture programs this summer. Forage quality and availability will be critical to those operations. Drought can have a dramatic effect on these programs. December 1 hay stocks did show a year-over-year increase in total hay supplies should supplemental feeding be necessary, but were still at historically lower levels. The USDA NASS May Crop Production report will provide a more current figure for stocks available and disappearance over the winter in the May 1 hay stocks estimate.

These data points will be useful to watch this summer and anticipate cattle on feed numbers and potential placements this fall. They will be equally as critical to understand how cow-calf country is faring and if we should expect to see drought driven reductions in breeding stock. Importantly, at this time the events of COVID-19 are shaping this cattle cycle in dramatic ways. Deepening drought conditions, however, would compound already uncertain times in the cattle industry.



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