

Last week USDA-NASS released the first week of pasture and range conditions for the U.S. This weekly update provides a barometer for cattle forage conditions across the country. Ratings are given by state to show what percent of pastures are in very poor, poor, fair, good or excellent grazing conditions. Pastures in very poor and poor conditions require additional feedstuffs to carry the normal stocking load for that area of the country.

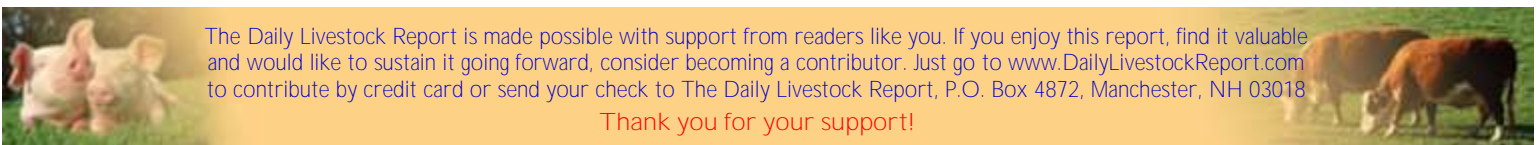
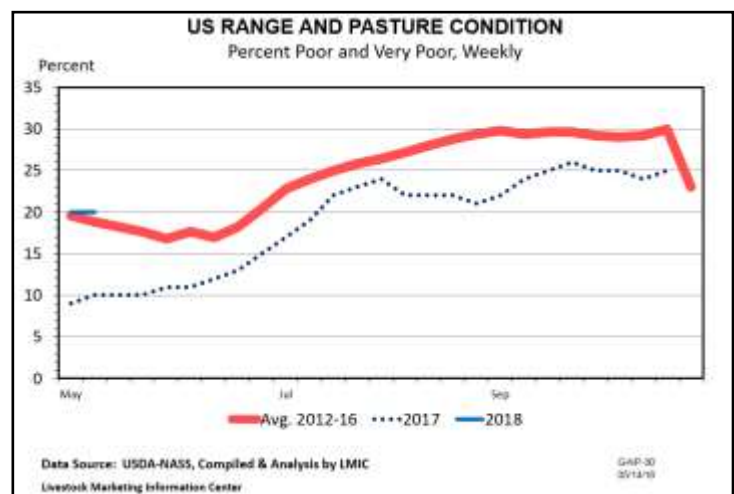
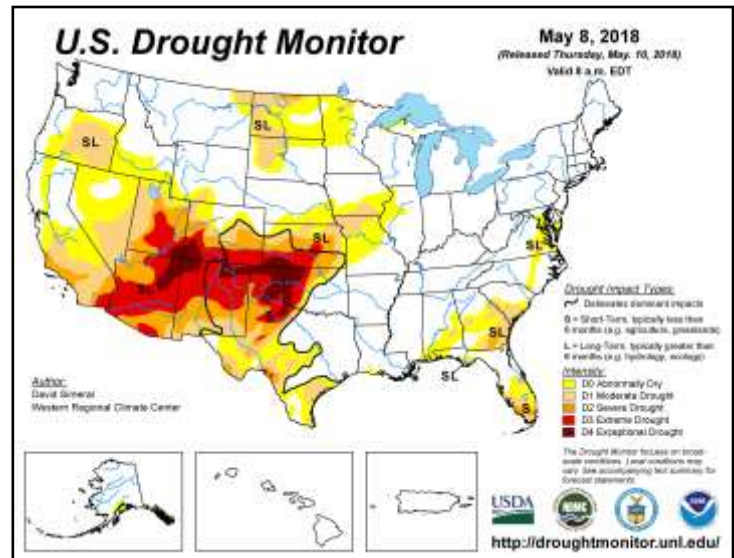
The 2018 season opened the first two weeks of the season with the lowest ratings seen for those same weeks since 2014. Approximately 20% of the U.S. pastures are in poor to very poor conditions. This is more than 10% higher than last year at this time.

One of the worse regions is the Western region, covering AZ, CA, ID, NV, NM, OR, UT, WA, which has more than 30% of pastures in poor to very poor conditions. The interesting dichotomy of the Pacific Northwest where very little drought has happened this year and the scorched southwest, paints a unique picture. Comparatively, the drought monitor indicates more than 40% of the U.S. is in a state of drought versus 20% of pasture conditions.

Even in areas where drought has not been problematic such as the southeast and the Northern plains. Pasture conditions are still having a slow start. The southeast reports pastures are coming around quickly as it warms in May but the last two weeks of Pasture and Range conditions indicate more than 10% are still requiring supplemental feeding. In the Northern Plains and upper Midwest a cool spring has delayed green-up.

Typical turn-out of cattle to grazing guidelines indicate that we may be a bit behind this year but are not necessarily in trouble. This continues to be a wait and see as the spring progresses to see if these pastures will take off quickly or if additional forage will be needed to offset struggling pastures. Inventories as of USDA's May 1 Hay Stocks showed availability was down throughout the U.S. but in particular in the southwest and southern plains inventories have plunged significantly, year over year.

At this point the hay outlook is also one where we have to wait and see. In warmer climates that are already starting cutting may be struggling to see high production, but it is still early enough in the season that price pressure ahead of the new crop could be short lived.



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