**DRG Media Group – Emily Rohrer on the Forage Production Maps**

**Jody Heemstra**

Welcome to Agriculture in Depth, presented by Kimball Livestock Exchange. I'm DRG media Group news and farm director Jody Heemstra.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources Conservation Service in South Dakota has published its latest Forage Production Report and Outlook. State Rangeland management specialist Emily Rohrer compiles the information used to produce both a current forage production map and an estimated forage production map for 6 to 8 weeks into the future.

**Emily Rohrer**

The forage reports that I put together are based off of our South Dakota drought tool, which is, it's an Excel based product that looks at a bunch of different stations across the state. So, looking at like CoCoRAHS and National Weather Service, NOAA weather stations to see what kind of precipitation has been received across the state. So, the Excel document, it's available to anybody.

If you can just download it and then you can look at your specific location or near you to see what your like status is. Or what I do is there's a button that I can push that runs all of the stations for the whole state, and then I use that information to build the map. So there's a current map and then a projected map.

So, the current map looks at like from today or from like May 1st, how much rain have we gotten and how does that compare to what we what the like normal is for this time of the year? And then the projected map looks at what we've gotten so far. And then it assumes from now until July 1st, that if we have normal precipitation from now until then, based on what we got before, that's kind of what's projected for production.

They're not 100%, you know, like it's just a model, but it gives you a good overview of conditions across the state, all based on a two year weighted average. So it looks at the precipitation that we've gotten the past two years. And then it weights like the spring precipitation and the fall precipitation a little bit differently, since those are really critical times for setting up our forages for growth.

**Jody Heemstra**

When we talk forage, what specifically crops, plants, things are you talking about?

**Emily Rohrer**

So for this we are just talking about like grassland production. So native or just like pasture basically this doesn't really relate to cropland. We're looking at the native and introduced grass species and like the Forbes and all of that, the NRCS in the past had done a lot of clippings and different data collection to help calibrate the models.

So it's all just based on pasture grasses basically. There is a spot in the document itself where you can put in your precipitation that you've collected over the past years, like if you CoCoRAHS or something like that, and then you can have a more, like something that's tailored to your operation versus just like picking a close weather station. So that's kind of a cool feature of the tool.

**Jody Heemstra**

How frequently does it come out? Is it monthly? Is it every week? Every couple of weeks? Just kind of depends on the weather. How does that work?

**Emily Rohrer**

Kind of depends on the weather. When it's dry like this, we try to do it every two weeks or so. That's just how the tool is set up. We can run it on the first of the month and then the 15th of the month. Otherwise, if it's like raining, I usually don't do it that often. If it's all green, like everyone's doing well. So I do try to run it every month for myself, just to keep it updated and make sure that I have all those for like historic purposes. But otherwise, right now we're doing it every two weeks until July 1st just to keep people updated.

**Jody Heemstra**

Anything else you'd like folks to know about the Forage production report and outlook? The people involved in putting it together, the places, it is, anything like that.

**Emily Rohrer**

The biggest thing is it's, it is a model. So I've always heard models are always wrong, but so you always have to look at your own operation and consider like, maybe you had a really good year or maybe the rains hit you and so you might not be hurting as bad as other people around you.

But this is a good starting point to figure out where you're at precipitation wise. And then you can go from there and always read the ground, read the grasses and that type of thing when you're turning out, because that's the most important part, is just being out on your operation and knowing what yours looks like compared to the normal.

**Jody Heemstra**

The South Dakota drought tool is something you look at and you said there's a document available for download. Where if folks are interested, and this is something they really want to keep track of, where do they find that document?

**Emily Rohrer**

It is available on the South Dakota NRCS website. You can just Google like South Dakota NRCS and find the website, and then you have to scroll down on the page and go to technical resources, I think.

And then if you click another link that opens up the range and pasture page, and then the drought tool is available on that page. And then there's also the maps that I produce will always be posted on that page as well. You can also go into our Field Office Tech Guide, which has all of the information that we use in the NRCS for putting conservation plans together and what we use, like what guidance is out there all publicly available.

And that is like if you search Field Office Tech guide, then you click on South Dakota and there's a search bar function. So you can just search for the South Dakota drought tool and you should find it that way. That's probably the easiest.

**Jody Heemstra**

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