

## WILDFIRE FOLLOWUP

Unusually high temperatures, dwindling supplies of irrigation water, and troublesome fires are leading some of my farmer friends to say; "We may be happy to have this summer come to an end." As a County, however, we have been abundantly blessed. Most of the crops are yielding quite well and the majority of our livestock are growing nicely. Our grazing lands have suffered, and dry farms are really dry, but as we compare our situation to other parts of the State, we should only feel gratitude.

Utah made national news several times last month with relentless wildfires. The Milford Flat fire in central Utah burned more than 363,000 acres in Beaver and Millard counties. The Neola North fire in the Uintah Basin consumed 43,500 acres, destroyed homes and even took the lives of three men. Carbon, Juab, San Pete, Iron and Emery Counties have also experienced significant losses in recent weeks to fire damage. Cache and Box Elder Counties have also had some fires to deal with. Thankfully, most structures have been saved and the loss of human life has been minimized. Unfortunately, our wildfire season is not over. If hot, dry conditions persist we may still have additional damage.

In recent weeks ranchers have worked hard to protect livestock and wildlife as much as possible. It appears that most animals fared quite well and managed to escape the full force of the fires. The major damage appears to be burned feet and singed teats and udders. Some animals had to be destroyed for humane reasons while others are being treated and carefully monitored by producers and veterinarians. The major damage appears to be the substantial loss of summer and winter forage for thousands of livestock and wildlife that have been displaced by the fires. Difficult decisions must quickly be made by producers, state and federal agencies, agricultural lenders and land managers.

Utah Partners for Conservation and Development are coordinating efforts to assist farmers and ranchers in relief efforts. A recent news release from Utah Department of Agriculture and Food (UDAF) outlines some of the immediate and long range plans these partners can offer for support. Additional suggestions are welcome and details will evolve as we move along.

USDA/NRCS has \$ 100,000 available immediately for wildfire relief. Additional funds have been requested as Governor Hunstman and Senator Bennett have asked Secretary of Agriculture Johanns to declare much of Utah an agricultural disaster area.

USU Extension has established a website (<http://extension.usu.edu/buysell/>) where individuals wishing to buy, sell or donate forage can communicate with each other. Most of us agree that there simply is not enough forage available for sale, anywhere in the state, to feed displaced animals. As such, the State Grazing Board is encouraging grain producers to bale all of their straw. Straw can be

used as a supplement, or even a replacement, for hay in beef cattle rations. Growers who have straw for sale can post on this same forage website.

Extension economists are also creating economic decision making tools that can be used to help producers make some difficult decisions as quickly as possible. These spreadsheets can be used to determine the costs and benefits of various options. Shall I purchase feed? Shall I sell cows? What are my anticipated costs while reestablishing healthy rangelands? We will be holding workshops, in cooperation with other agencies, to help producers make these decisions.

UDAF's grazing Improvement program has limited funds available for competitive grants to repair fencing, reestablish grazing lands, and replace water development projects.

BLM and Forest Service are looking for opportunities to provide forage for displaced permittees. This may prove to be a difficult challenge. Permittees are encouraged to contact their local BLM or Forest Service office.

USDA/FSA's livestock compensation program compensates livestock producers for feed losses resulting from natural disasters. The emergency conservation program provides emergency funding and technical assistance to restore farmland damaged by natural disasters. There may also be a possibility of grazing CRP acreage to provide feed to livestock in areas affected.

We have a partial list of farmers and ranchers who have been impacted by this summer's fires. We would request all affected producers to contact the Extension office so we can provide important information and programming as it becomes available. In the meantime, take a day off this week and come enjoy the Cache County Fair and Rodeo.