



Defense Against Drought Guide

Drought always has and always will impact Utah agriculture, and the occurrence and impacts of drought will likely increase in the future. Some effects of drought cannot be avoided, but below are six tools to mitigate negative effects.

6 Drought Defense Tools

1. Crop Variety Selection

Alfalfa is a popular crop in Utah because of its relatively high drought tolerance and tolerance should be an important consideration when selecting an alfalfa variety. Wheat and corn varieties should also be selected with drought tolerance in mind as small grains and corn are negatively impacted by drought.

2. Crop Rotation Diversification

There are several crops that could be used to help diversify crop portfolios in Utah. There are several factors to consider when choosing alternative crops, like water use, cost, and growth characteristics. Extension personnel can provide more information on the most appropriate alternative crops for the specific area.

3. Irrigation Management

Available irrigation water should be dedicated to the most productive land first; irrigation should be timed to coincide with growth stages with the highest water demand and/or greatest effect on yield. Other ways to stretch water supply include underirrigating all season, refining irrigation rates, and improving efficiency.

4. Manage For Tight Margins

Trim expenses to save where possible. Stock up on inputs and feed in advance or thin out herd size. Manage financial position by strengthening it in strong years, pay down debt, and strive for steady growth.

5. Improve Irrigation Systems

There are trade offs to every irrigation system and ways to optimize water use. See the full guide for system specific information. Consulting with Extension personnel, irrigation companies and other professionals to explore the available options for irrigation system upgrades is recommended.

6. Modify Crop Management

Tillage and residue management practices and proper manure management can be adjusted to help increase and conserve soil moisture. Consider the best time to plant water availability. Pick pest resistant crop variety and watch carefully for pests. Cover Crops to conserve soil moisture.

View full factsheet: <https://extension.usu.edu/crops/research/defense-against-drought>