

May is beef month! As the grass greens up and we start to turn cows out, questions arise about stocking rates and soil and plant health due to the prolonged drought. In response, Keith Harmony, K-State Research and Extension range scientist at the Agricultural Research Center in Hays developed a decision tree that provides some guidelines given the pasture's current soil moisture condition and the relative level of stress on the pasture last year. He discussed the use of this tool during a webinar "Decision Making For Grass Turnout in Western Kansas" presented on April 4th, 2023, that is now available for viewing on [KSUBeef.org](https://ksubeef.org). A handout of the decision tree and other items are linked below the video.

Harmony also discussed how to use April, May and June precipitation amounts received this year as a proportion of the long-term average to help estimate the current year forage production. The decision tree and predictions of forage growth apply to native pastures in the western half of the state.

If you have a pasture lease that has no clause or plan for stocking rate adjustments due to drought, this webinar and associated materials may help all parties get a better understanding of relationships between previous grazing pressure, precipitation, and forage production.

A landlord that makes no accommodation for drought risks overgrazing, delayed drought recovery, weed problems and a decrease in long-term production (and pasture value). The tenant trying to cope with this situation risks poor animal performance and increased health issues from an inadequate diet and or added feed cost.

Changing terms in a lease can result in uncomfortable discussions, however, drought is a clear part of our history and should be part of any management plan for native pastures. Work towards a lease agreement that is built around animal unit months (AUMs) that accounts for animal weight, forage production and length of grazing period. While drought is the most common reason for a drastic drop in forage production to be considered in a lease, a disaster clause could include fire or hail as well.