

## Board of Directors

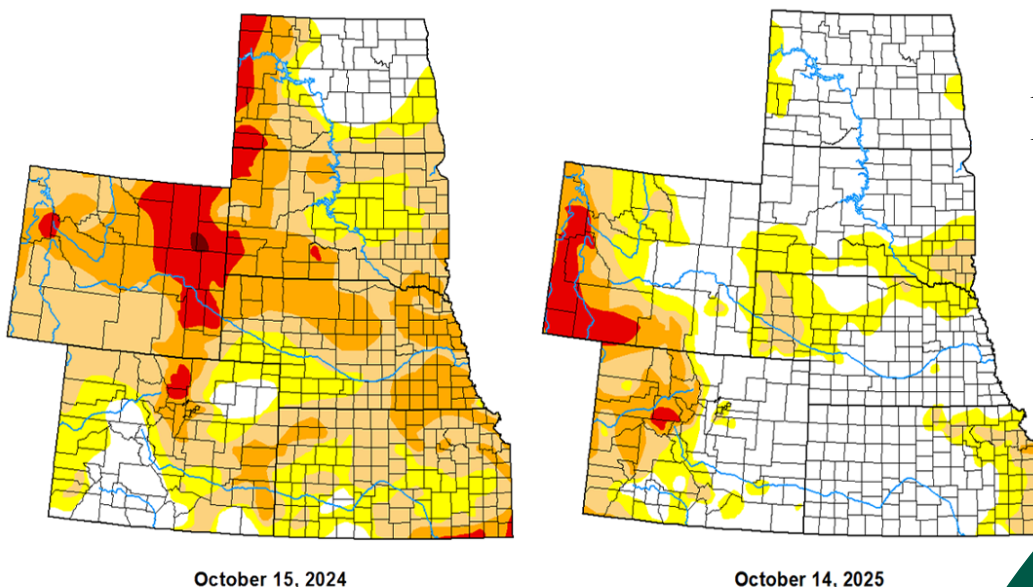
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## Fall Pasture Report: Considerations for Dormant Season Grazing by Kaylee Wheeler

### What Are the Current Drought Conditions?

As compared to a year ago, the 2025 growing season has brought significant improvements to previously very dry Northern Great Plains (Figure 1). Recent fall rains across the region continue to improve soil moisture conditions in preparation for the dormant season and freezing temperatures. Unlike in years past, a fall green up has been in full swing for much of the region.

The 4-week Evaporative Demand Drought Index (abbreviated as EDDI) ending October 10, 2025 is notable, because it shows the abnormally wet impact of abundant precipitation in western South Dakota (Figure 2). But it also indicates some potential drying out in the eastern part of the state. Evaporative demand essentially refers to the “thirst of the landscape” based on both precipitation and temperature. This map is used to indicate the potential for drought conditions to emerge.



*Figure 1. Comparison of the U.S. Drought Monitor from October 2024 (left) to October 2025 (right). (Courtesy: US Drought Monitor)*

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Dec 4-5, Box Elder**  
Grassland Coalition Annual Conference

**Jan 13-14, Aberdeen**  
Soil Health Conference

# Fall Pasture Report: Considerations for Dormant Season Grazing Continued...

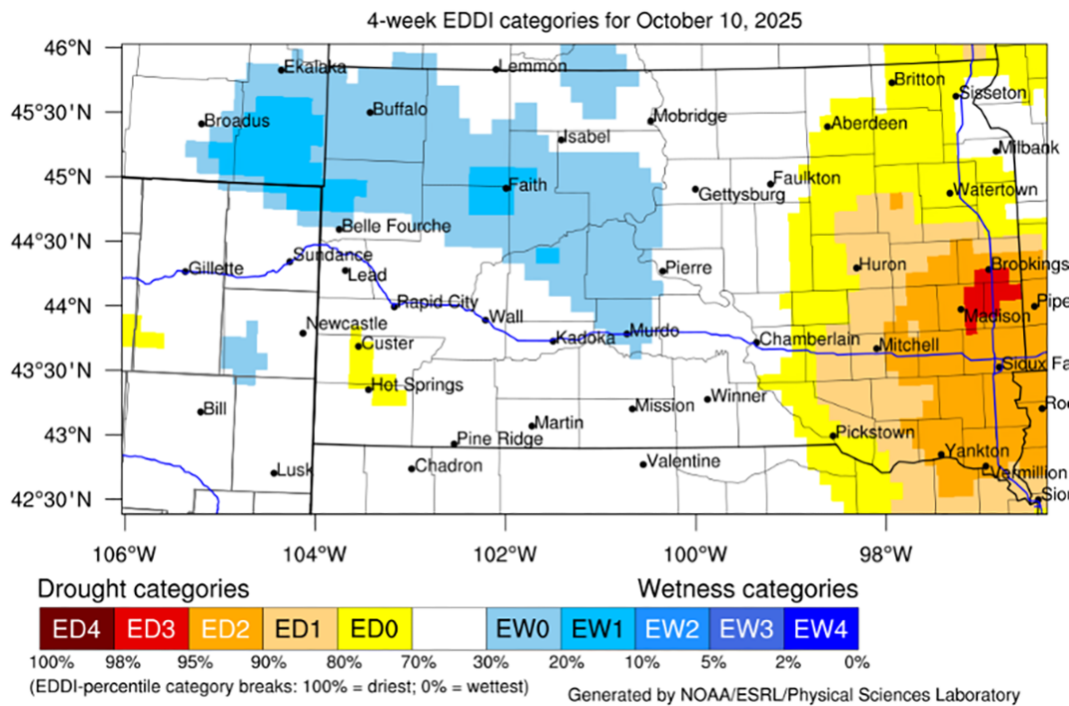


Figure 2. The 4-week Evaporative Demand Drought Index (EDDI) for South Dakota ending on October 10, 2025. The index considers the previous 4 weeks starting on September 10, 2025 (Courtesy: South Dakota Mesonet Drought Dashboard).

## Understanding the Importance of Fall Precipitation and Soil Armor

The new water year began on October 1st, 2025, which means it’s a good time to reflect on precipitation events of the previous year and begin looking ahead to the dormant season. The water year begins in October because of how impactful dormant precipitation is for recharging soil moisture and kickstarting plant growth conditions in the spring.

It is very important to have some pasture recovery before dormancy occurs, or at least to leave behind enough standing forage and soil surface armor to protect the soil. Healthy soil provides the foundation for robust pasture landscapes. Keeping the soil surface covered with enough plant material will reduce erosion potential, absorb and store moisture, as well as provide an insulation layer to protect soil microbes and organic material for them to break down.

## What Are the Current Climate Outlooks Predicting?

Looking ahead to winter, the outlooks currently average chances of precipitation (Figure 3) and temperature (Figure 4) for the next three months in South Dakota. Although there is a slight chance for above average seasonal precipitation in the northwest part of the state. As we move into the start of a new year, it will be important to keep an eye on these forecasts.

# Fall Pasture Report: Considerations for Dormant Season Grazing Continued...

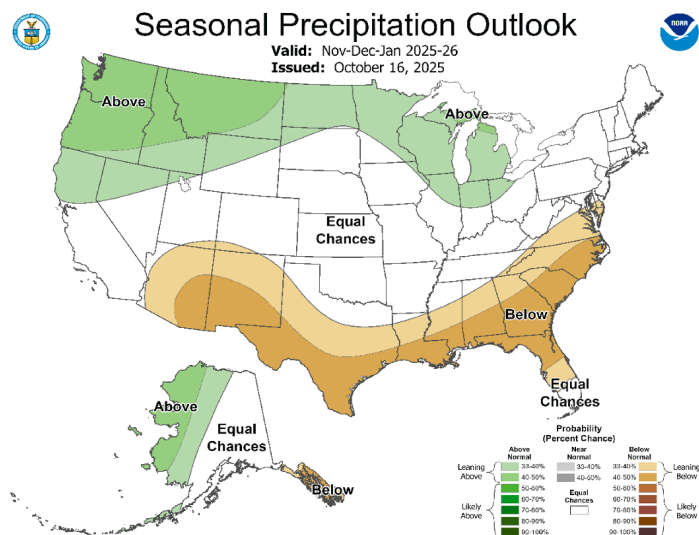


Figure 3. Current 3-month precipitation outlook. (Courtesy: NOAA Climate Prediction Center)

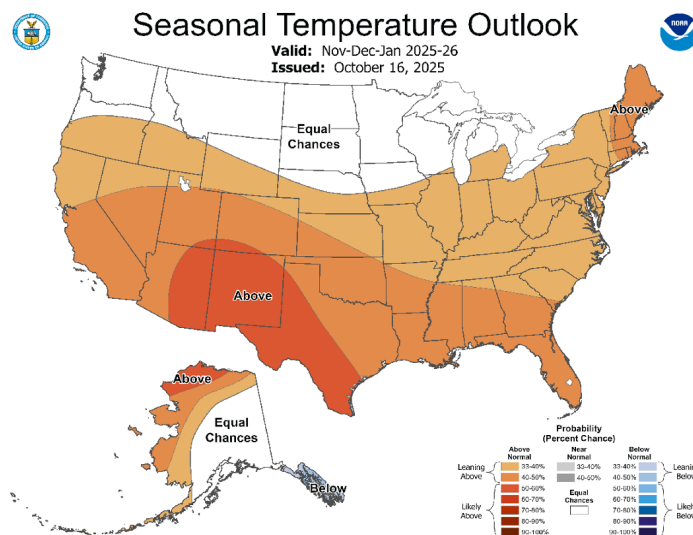


Figure 4. Current 3-month temperature outlook. (Courtesy: NOAA Climate Prediction Center)

## What Are Your Plans for Winter?

The beginning of a new water year and the start of fall is a great trigger date to investigate the following questions:

### Moisture/Climate

- How much precipitation was received:
  - During the 2025 water year? (October 1, 2024 through October 1, 2025)
  - During this calendar year? (January 1, 2025)
  - During this year's growing season? (beginning April 1, 2025)
- Are there chances of precipitation in the upcoming weeks?
- What are current weather outlooks predicting in the coming days, weeks, and months?
- What are current drought conditions in your area?
- How much soil moisture exists now?

### Forage

- What is the current condition of your pastures?
  - How much standing forage exists?
  - How much soil cover exists?
  - How much recovery has occurred since the last grazing event?
- How much forage production did you have this year? (Above, below, or average)
- Do you plan to graze stockpiled dormant pasture?
- What are your current feed resources for the dormant season? (Stockpiled grazing, harvested forage, hay, silage, cubes, etc.)

## Fall Pasture Report: Considerations for Dormant Season Grazing Continued...

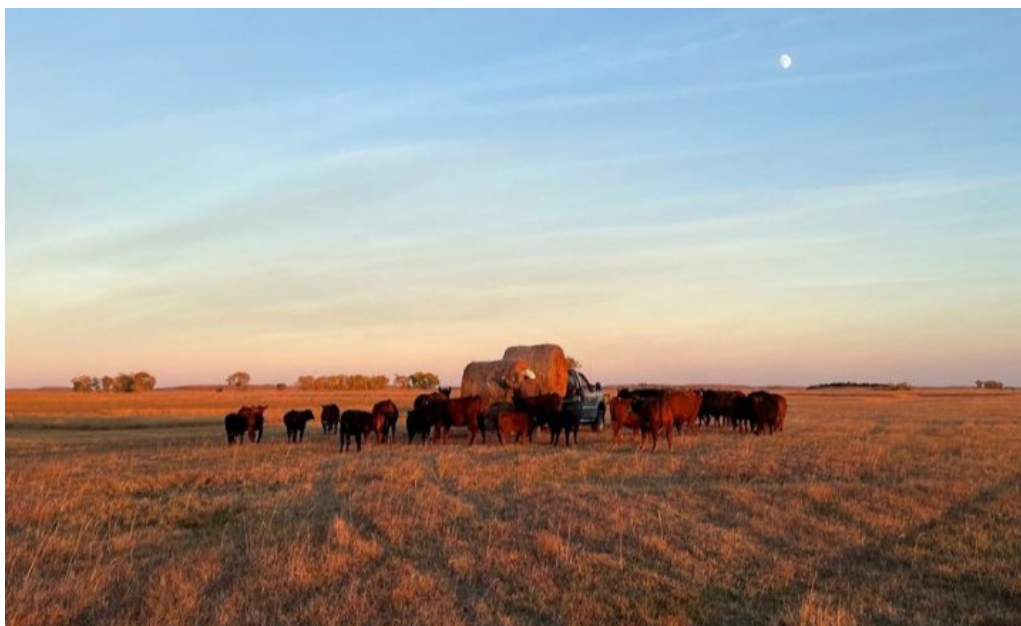
- What are the feed markets indicating? Is it a good time to lay in extra supply?
- Are there alternative grazing resources you could take advantage of? (Winter grazing your stockpiled pasture, grazing cover crops, grazing corn residue, etc.)

### Livestock

- What are your cow body conditions? (Are they thin or fleshy? Are they gaining weight or losing?)
- If cows are thin, do you have a nutritional plan to improve body condition before calving?
- What are the cattle markets indicating? Can you take advantage of high prices with strategic culling?
- What is your culling / destocking strategy? Do you know which animals will be the first to go?

### Considerations for the Dormant Season Grazing Ahead

The greatest sum for most livestock operation budgets is simply keeping the cows fed. Cost of feeding further increase in the winter, due to the need to provide more harvested forages and supplementation. Finding ways to reduce feed costs without sacrificing performance, will improve the financial sustainability of the operation. That's why fall is a great time to consider alternative grazing strategies on cropland. Once the cash crop is out of the ground, livestock often have access to high nutrient quality cover crops or low-cost crop residue to graze.



*Credit: Kaylee Wheeler, SDSU Extension)*

As a result of timely rains across the state, it is likely that many pastures were able to experience adequate recovery and substantial growth as we near the dormant season. Winter grazing of this stockpiled grass can help extend the grazing season and reduce the amount of hay required. Although dormant grasses are lower quality and you will likely still need to provide a protein supplement to ensure cows are meeting their nutritional requirements as they advance in gestation.

*"As a reminder, it can be easy to lean back and enjoy the 'good times' while precipitation is plentiful, and cattle markets are high. During times like these, it's important to prioritize proactive management and strategic decision making. Often it is the decisions we make now which determines our success during the hard times." – Kaylee Wheeler, SDSU Extension Range Field Specialist.*

# Cattle Health Starts with Human Behavior: Insights from Dr. Tom Noffsinger

by Garnet Perman

Dr. Tom Noffsinger, well known for his low stress animal handling methods will be speaking at the SDGC annual meeting in December. Dr. Noffsinger earned his DVM from Colorado State University in 1973 and entered private practice in Benkelman, NE, the bulk of which was cow/calf and small feedlots. In 2005 he helped found Production Animal Consultation which oversees over 200,000 feedlot cattle.

## Getting Started with Low Stress Methods

Variations in condition and response of cattle coming into feedlots was a major concern in his early practice. A co-worker's report about attending a Bud Williams workshop piqued Noffsinger's interest in low stress methods.

Williams lived with Noffsinger for four years starting in 1999, and he's been learning and sharing better ways to handle animals ever since. Others who have influenced what and how he teaches include Chris and Miranda Donaho from Australia, and Lucy and Shane Morency from Brazil. Most of the people he's learned the most from didn't have a fancy degree but were observant and willing to try new things.

## The Impact of Human Behavior on Cattle Health

Most cattle problems are the result of a change of address such as weaning time, moving pastures or being shipped to a feedlot. An early lesson was the profound impact human behavior has on cattle health. Noffsinger has made a point of studying the physiology of cattle as it relates to interacting with humans.

What should a person focus on first when implementing no stress methods? Noffsinger said learning correct handler position is number one. Slow down, be quiet and wait until the animals are ready to go where you want them to go. It seems counter intuitive to many people, but it works. He teaches people to work from the front of the animal instead of behind. "It's so rewarding to work from the front," he said.

## Improving Stockmanship Skills

Observation and spending time with your animals is also key to improving stockmanship skills. Identify the influential herd members and work with them, and the rest of the herd will follow. Noticing micro behaviors, such as eyelash and nostril movement and weight shifting helps a person understand how the animal is responding to human direction. Rewarding even a small try on the animals' part will help them learn. "The goal is to have animals come to you because they want to be with you," said Noffsinger.

He noted that emphasizing the relationship between stress and the immune system is good for animal survival but not for health. He focuses on human behavior that induces happy hormones in livestock like dopamine and serotonin instead of stress hormones like cortisol.



## Cattle Health Starts with Human Behavior: Insights from Dr. Tom Noffsinger Continued...

Noffsinger is a believer in life long learning and will share some new things he's learned about cattle sensory systems that explains the behaviors of influential members of the herd. He will emphasize the role of stockman as a care giver instead of a care taker in a presentation titled "Care Giver Impact on Cattle Health Performance and Well Being". Noffsinger said that while his primary focus is cattle, the methods he uses carry over to other species including people.

He is looking forward to returning to SD in December. "Come with an attitude of sharing," he said. He wants to hear what works on your ranches as well.

## Breakout Sessions at the 2025 Annual Conference by Briana Rupp

This year's Annual Conference is designed with the whole family in mind. Alongside dynamic keynote presentations, attendees can look forward to a full lineup of breakout sessions covering a wide range of practical, inspiring, and family-focused topics. Whether you're managing the ranch, supporting from behind the scenes, or just getting started in agriculture, we invite you to come and take in all the value this year's conference has to offer. We have the full schedule posted on our website, and here's a sneak peek at the breakout session topics.

### Getting Started with Direct-to-Consumer Sales

*Gwen Kitzan, Kitzan Family Farms*

This session will walk you through the essentials of knowing your customer, telling your farm story, and choosing the right sales channels for your products. You'll also gain practical strategies for planning production, increasing sales and loyalty, and using tracking to refine and grow your business. Perfect for producers ready to take control of their marketing and build stronger relationships with their buyers.

### Virtual Fencing Jacey Ellsworth, Rancher & Customer Engagement Rep at eShepherd Virtual Fence

Explore how Virtual Fencing is reshaping livestock management in this informative session. Learn how the technology works, what's needed to get started, and hear real-world examples of ranchers successfully using it across diverse landscapes. Presenter will highlight the benefits for pasture rotation, labor savings, and land protection, along with insights on animal training and adapting herds to the system. The session will also cover cost considerations and options for both seasonal and year-round use.

### Support the Conference Through Sponsorship

December 4-5, 2025

Are you looking for a great way to promote your ranch or ag business? Become a sponsor of the South Dakota Grassland Coalition's Annual Conference! Sponsors receive **booth space** at the event—an excellent opportunity to showcase your bulls, specialty livestock, or ag-related products and services to producers from across the state. Your support helps us continue our mission of promoting healthy, productive grasslands while connecting you directly with your target audience.

Please let us know no later than Monday, November 24 if you would like to become a sponsor and set up a booth at this event.

# Breakout Sessions at the 2025 Annual Conference Continued...

## Small Acreage Considerations and Opportunities

*Pete Bauman, SDSU Extension*

This session explores the options for viewing a small acreage from a business perspective and beyond. Presentation will provide a general framework for interactive discussion and will allow audience participants the opportunity to share experiences and insights. Participants will engage in recognizing and aligning land use with family interests and talents, identify income streams that make sense for their scale, and make the most of existing assets like barns, sheds, and outbuildings and markets.

## Funding Assistance Opportunities

*Laura Kahler, South Dakota Grasslands Initiative Director*

South Dakota Grasslands Initiative Director Laura Kahler shares how producers can be good stewards of the land while improving their bottom line. She highlights why South Dakota's grasslands matter, how conservation partners support working lands, and practical ways ranchers can collaborate with conservation partners for technical and financial assistance.

## Women in Ranching: Cultivating Confidence

*Andrea Flemming, 5th Generation Farmer & Content Creator for @thatfitagvocate*

When it comes to overall business success and feeling aligned in life, knowing your WHY & finding your authentic voice is key. We, as women, bring a lot to the table -- and it's time we find our voice and use it to make a positive impact in our businesses. We will have real & raw conversations in this workshop and pinpoint your strengths, guiding you to how you can become a huge asset to the business just by being you.

## Winter Grazing

*Brett Nix, Rancher & Former SDGC Board Member*

Join a seasoned rancher and former SDGC board member as he shares his firsthand experience with Winter Grazing—what's worked, what hasn't, and what to expect when extending your grazing season. This session offers practical insights into managing livestock, forage, and weather challenges through the winter months, helping producers reduce feed costs and make the most of their available resources.

## Small to Medium Size Gardening and Entrepreneurial Opportunities

*Michelle Grosek, Bear Butte Gardens*

Discover how to turn your passion for growing into a thriving small business in this session on Small to Medium Size Gardening and Entrepreneurial Opportunities. Learn how to grow what you love, identify your niche, and make the most of every harvest. Whether you're looking to feed your family, sell locally, or expand into value-added products, this session will offer practical ideas for using and marketing all that you grow.

## Highly Intensive Non-selective Grazing

*Charlie Totton & Courtney Tyrrell, Totton Angus Ranch*

Dive into the principles and proven results of Highly Intensive, Non-Selective Grazing in this insightful session. Learn how mob grazing with daily moves during the growing season can boost warm-season native grasses and improve soil health. Presenters will share practical experiences with swath grazing in winter, long-term soil test results after a decade of intensive management, and the added benefits of across-the-fence weaning. This session offers a real-world look at how strategic grazing can transform both productivity and ecosystem resilience.

## Grazing Management Principles & Practices: A Case Study

*Dan Rasmussen, 3<sup>rd</sup> Generation Rancher & SDGC Range Consultant and Dave Ollila, Soil Health Technician*

We will have two sessions, each covering its own case study that includes an in-depth look at practical grazing management. We'll walk through the challenges and opportunities faced on working ranches - discussing management decisions, soil health improvements, and strategies for boosting production while building resilience. These sessions will be interactive, offering participants the chance to ask questions and explore realistic solutions to common grazing and soil management obstacles.

## Registration

Please be sure to register for the conference by Monday, November 24 so we can get a head count for meals.

See you there!



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QUESTIONS OR REQUESTS

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#### **A SPECIAL NOTE TO OUR VALUED MEMBERS**

Your support helps keep this work moving forward. The future of South Dakota's grasslands, ranches, and rural communities depends on continued care, collaboration, and commitment—and we're grateful to have you with us on that journey. We welcome your feedback and invite you to reach out anytime—whether you're looking for more information, want to suggest a topic, or just have ideas to share. And as always, we encourage you to stay involved, spread the word, and help others connect with our work.