ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES FOR DROUGHT FAILED COTTON CROPS

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With the brutal, extensive droughts through many parts of the U.S. during the past few years, many cotton producers have had a year or years of failed cotton crops due to drought. Producers with crop insurance have been able to recoup some of their investment in the crop. Those producers without crop insurance were not able to recoup any of their out-of-pocket costs. What if the producers of these lost crops could perhaps find a way to market the lost crop? Cotton seed (with some lint) and cottonseed meal are well known as standard feedstuffs of high nutritive value for ruminant animals. However, if insurance eligibility regulations on drought damaged cotton allow, the failed crop could be baled into round bales like hay and fed to cattle during the winter months.

The baled cotton would then become a substitute feedstuff for fair to good quality alfalfa hay. Such alfalfa hay has crude protein (CP) content of 18% – 20.5% and a total digestible nutrient (TDN) content of 51.5% – 53.5%. October 2011 analyses by Texas A&M researchers reported that whole cotton plants in the College Station area (stems, leaves, and bolls) contained: CP = 13.3% and TDN = 62.4%; whole plants minus the leaves showed 11.2% CP and 58.8% TDN; and lint and seeds from a standard harvested module contained 15.5% CP and 59.4% TDN. Given these analyses and assuming that alfalfa hay was selling for $270.00 per ton, then each 100 pounds of lint in the drought ravaged field would provide an estimated 325 pounds of total cotton (lint, seed, stems, and leaves). Thus from a nutritive standpoint, that weight of cotton could effectively be substituted for an equivalent weight of alfalfa hay, and would equal $43.85 in nutritional value.