



# THE NEW FOOTHILL RANCHER

...Practical Information for Foothill Livestock Producers

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Placer—Nevada—Sutter—Yuba Counties



January 2019

### Placer County

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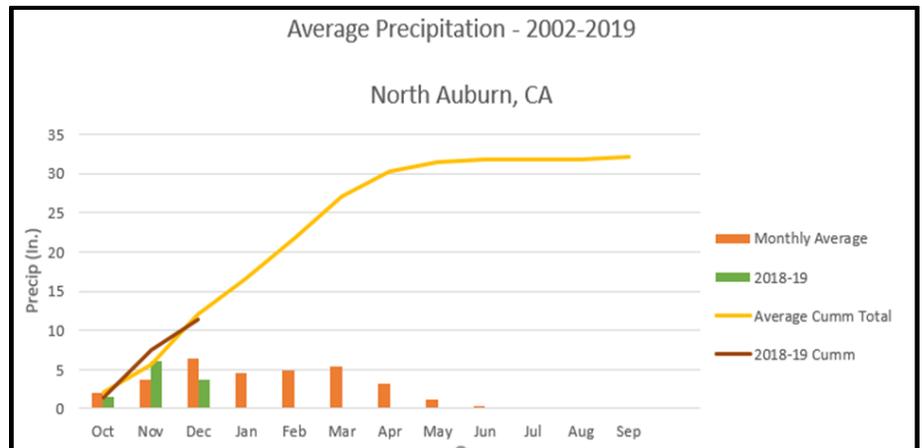
E-mail: [sutteryuba@ucanr.edu](mailto:sutteryuba@ucanr.edu)

### WEB SITE:

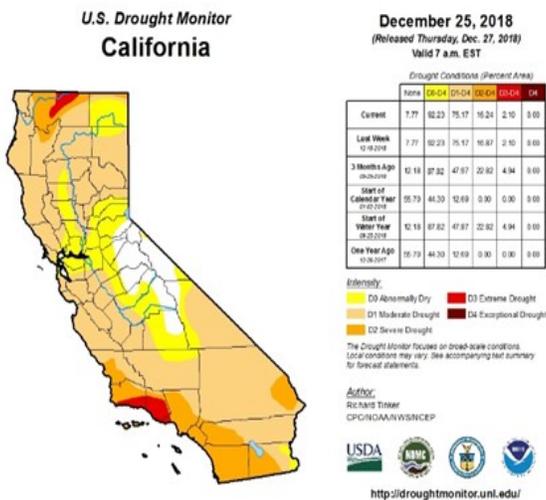
[ceplacernevada.ucdavis.edu](http://ceplacernevada.ucdavis.edu)

## Reporting on Drought

As experienced ranchers know, grass growth during the fall, winter, and spring months depends on a variety of factors. Precipitation, certainly, is important; so are soil and air temperature, day length, and the timing of rainfall. The current forage year in the Sierra Foothills is a case in point! Here in Auburn, we received a germinating rain in early October. Without any follow-up rain until Thanksgiving, this early germination failed (for the most part). Other parts of the foothills and Sacramento Valley didn't receive any germinating rainfall until those late November storms. At that point, the days were too short to stimulate much forage production. Indeed, the UC Sierra Foothill Research and Extension Center in Browns Valley determined that there was not any green forage to measure on December 1, 2018 - they clipped their first sample last week. As I look at the annual rangelands where our sheep are grazing currently, I don't see much green grass. As the graph below indicates, we have received close-to-normal moisture (finally), but we need longer days and warmer temperatures to get the grass to grow.



The most recent U.S. Drought Monitor map for California backs up my subjective observations. Most of Placer and Nevada Counties are in the D0 designation (abnormally dry). Most of Sutter and Yuba Counties are in D1 (moderate drought). Thanks to the leadership of Dr. Leslie Roche, our UC Cooperative Extension Specialist for rangeland management at UC Davis, county range and livestock advisors and other range professionals are reporting local conditions to the U.S. Drought Monitor on a monthly basis during the fall, winter and spring. Based on local observations, formal measurements of forage production, and reports from ranchers, these monthly updates bring greater resolution - and more on-the-ground perspectives - to the U.S. Drought Monitor's weekly drought reports and longer-term drought forecasts.



Individuals can also report on drought conditions directly! One of the easiest ways to regularly report on precipitation is to join the Community Collaborative Rain, Hail & Snow Network (COCORAHNS - <https://www.cocorahns.org/>). I've been a member of this network for 3 or 4 years. Using the COCORAHNS rain gauge (which provides an accurate and standardized measurement), I simply report precipitation when it occurs by using the network's phone app. Using the app, I can also view nearby precipitation amounts on county and regional maps. These measurements are automatically shared with the Drought Monitor, providing real-time information about local precipitation across the U.S. The rain gauges are \$31.50 and are easy to install. If you're in Placer or Nevada Counties, we have a limited supply of rain gauges available to farmers and ranchers who sign up to be COCORAHNS reporters. Contact me at [dmacon@ucanr.edu](mailto:dmacon@ucanr.edu) for details!

The National Drought Mitigation Center has also developed a new report form that allows users to enter site-specific conditions like precipitation, creek and spring flow, forage conditions, livestock impacts, and other drought-related effects. While our network of advisors and rangeland professionals is providing monthly input via this report, individual farmers and ranchers can also report conditions directly at <https://survey123.arcgis.com/share/49e1807892e143b5b8256e0128cf3ddb>.



While quantitative data is important (like precipitation amounts, pounds of forage production per acre, soil moisture and temperature, etc.), qualitative data is also critical to informing the Drought Monitor. For example, if your creeks are typically flowing by Thanksgiving, but are not flowing this year, report that fact! If you've noted that the early germinated grass has since died, report that as well! Each data point, whether quantitative or qualitative, improves the resolution of the weekly drought maps!

Finally, the UC Rangelands website has an outstanding Rangeland Drought Information Hub, with links to the Drought Impacts Reporter and Drought Monitor, weather and climate information, our Voices from the Drought audio archive, and research-based information on preparing for and responding to drought conditions. Check it out at <http://rangelands.ucdavis.edu/drought/>.

## The Importance of Keeping Track

If you're like me, you can sometimes feel dazed by the amount of information available with a click of a mouse or a swipe of a smartphone screen. Data can be useful; too much data can be overwhelming! But if you're operating a ranching business, certain types of data – and the way in which that data is organized and analyzed – can be critical to your success. Here are just a few ways that data can improve our management:

- Production data (pounds of beef or lamb produced, pounds of grass harvested, etc.) can help us determine which animals (or pastures) are most productive.
- Objective maternal behavior measurements can help us decide which cows (or ewes, or does) to retain, and which to cull.
- Precipitation data (including both quantity and timing) can be important for determining when and if to implement a drought plan.
- Financial data – the bottom line – is important in determining whether a business or enterprise is profitable.

But the raw numbers are not helpful on their own, nor is data that we can't use to make effective management decisions. Let me explain:

In our small sheep enterprise, one of our most limiting factors is labor. As a part-time business, we have to be as efficient as possible with our time. Consequently, we've identified several key periods in our production year when we need to focus on labor efficiency – lambing being the foremost example. As we thought this through, we realized that lambing and mothering problems are the main drivers in terms of labor during lambing season. We also found that 20 percent of our ewes were creating 80 percent of the labor demand – these were the ewes that needed help delivering their lambs, or that couldn't count to two and nurse twins. These were the ewes that were not producing sufficient milk. About 12 years ago, I read an article about a record-keeping system in the U.K. that helped shepherds identify those problems (called the EZ Care Lambing System). At lambing, we give each ewe an objective score on three criteria (lambing ease, lamb vigor, and maternal ability). Those ewes that don't measure up are sold at weaning, along with their daughters. By using this simple scorecard and record-keeping system, we have eliminated most of that 20 percent – and made our labor much more efficient! This same system could be used in other species, too!



Sometimes the data we're already collecting reveals different information if we re-think our approach. For example, most of us seem to focus on weaning weights or seasonal gain – after all, we get paid on this weight, right?! But this metric can sometimes give us a false sense of security. Rather than measure our success based on weight or gain per animal, what if we measured it by the acre grazed? This might make sense when evaluating calving season, for example. Spring-born calves in the Sierra Foothills might weigh less at weaning than fall-born calves, but what if we wean more pounds of calf per acre in our spring-calving group? Average weaning weight on its own won't tell us this.

Finally, what about comparing data with our neighbors? Again, most of us are comfortable sharing weaning weights or conception rates – how many of us compare net worth or end-of-year profit figures? Aren't those bottom-line numbers the most critical in determining the success of our businesses? For me, this is where the idea of benchmarks has value. I wouldn't want to share my year-end profit numbers with anyone, but I would be willing to share the ratio between total revenue and direct costs (what Dave Pratt's Ranching for Profit School calls my "Gross Margin Ratio"). This benchmark allows me to compare my success against that of other ranching businesses – regardless of size.

I've found that keeping effective records requires dedication. Remember that smartphone I mentioned? It's nearly always with me – and so it's a useful place to keep records in real-time. I now record pasture moves when I make them (including the size of the new pasture, and the number and class of animal grazing in it). I record animal health treatments and significant tasks. I take a photo of each ranch receipt so that I have a record to enter into my books. I have found it's like any other healthy habit – it takes a few weeks of focusing on it before it becomes second nature.

**Be sure to check out our upcoming workshop [“Farm/Ranch Business Planning Short Course”](#) - see on page 5**

## California Animal Health and Food Safety Lab Updates



The California Animal Health and Food Safety (CAHFS) Lab is a tremendous resource for livestock producers throughout the state. With four locations (at UC Davis, San Bernardino, Tulare, and Turlock), the CAHFS system serves commercial producers, veterinarians, and backyard livestock owners alike.

CAHFS has a new “Client’s Guide to Submitting to CAHFS” on its website . (go to <http://ucanr.edu/cahfsclientguide>). CAHFS has also updated its necropsy fee schedule and is adding a disposal surcharge due to an increase in rendering costs. Even with these fee increases, sending an animal to the CAHFS lab for a necropsy is generally cheaper than having the rendering company pick it up – and you can get valuable information beyond the cause of death. Here are the updated necropsy fees:

Species	Necropsy Fee	Disposal Surcharge
	(In-state) Effective 4/1/19	(In-state) Effective 2/1/19
Equine	\$200	\$200
Camelid	\$150	\$200
Bovine	\$140	\$50
Caprine/Ovine/Porcine	\$135	\$35
Rabbit	\$135	\$5
Food Animal up to 3 months (per group up to 3)	\$135	\$0
Poultry/Game Bird (per group up to 8)	\$135	\$5
Backyard Flock (Poultry, per group up to 2)	\$25	\$5

# Winter/Spring Workshops Calendar

January 2019		
January 17	<p><b>Shepherd Skills Workshop: Sheep Management Basics</b></p> <p>Join other new and aspiring shepherds for an evening workshop on general sheep husbandry, production calendars, sheep nutrition, and economic analysis.</p> <p>RSVP: <a href="http://ucanr.edu/sheepmanagementbasic">http://ucanr.edu/sheepmanagementbasic</a></p>	<p>UCCE-Auburn 11477 E Ave Auburn, CA</p> <p>\$5/person</p>
January 19	<p><b>Shepherd Skills Workshop: Preparing Ewes for Lambing Field Day</b></p> <p>This hands-on workshop will include information on vaccinating sheep, ewe management, ewe nutrition, and general husbandry topics. Rain or shine!</p> <p>RSVP: <a href="http://ucanr.edu/preparingewes4lambing">http://ucanr.edu/preparingewes4lambing</a></p>	<p>Blue Oak Ranch Auburn, CA</p> <p>\$5/person</p>
January 31–March 7 Additionally Feb 9 & 16		
<p>Thursdays: January 31 to March 7</p> <p>Saturdays: Feb 9 &amp; 16</p>	<p><b>Farm/Ranch Business Planning Short Course</b></p> <p>Join other farmers and ranchers for a 6-week, 8-session short course covering farm economics, cash flow management, operations planning, risk management, and marketing strategies. The course is on Thursday nights (6-9 p.m.) from Jan. 31 to Mar. 7, plus Saturday, Feb. 9, and Saturday, Feb. 16. The course is limited to 8 operations.</p> <p>Apply at: <a href="http://ucanr.edu/farmbizplanning2019">http://ucanr.edu/farmbizplanning2019</a></p>	<p>UCCE-Auburn 11477 E Ave. Auburn, CA</p> <p>\$50/operation</p>

## Winter/Spring Workshops Calendar

February 2019		
February 12	<p><b>California Rangeland Climate &amp; Drought Workshop: Weather Grass and Drought – Planning for Uncertainty</b></p> <p>UCCE, in partnership with the National Drought Mitigation Center, the USDA California Climate Hub, and the National Integrated Drought Information System, is hosting 4 regional workshops on climate and drought resources to support short- and longer-term rangeland drought planning.</p> <p>Topics covered will include: A behind the scenes look at the US Drought Monitor; Overview of drought programs and assistance; and Weather monitoring and forecast products and drought early warning systems.</p> <p>RSVP at: <a href="http://ucanr.edu/loomisdroughtworkshop">http://ucanr.edu/loomisdroughtworkshop</a></p>	<p>Loomis Vets Hall 5945 Horseshoe Bar Rd. Loomis, CA</p> <p>\$10/person</p>
February 16	<p><b>Continuity Planning Workshop</b></p> <p>What would happen to your farm or ranch if <u>you</u> disappeared?! Do you keep all of your operation's important information stored in your brain? Join other local farmers and ranchers for an afternoon discussion about preparing your farming or ranching operation to continue in your absence.</p> <p>Stay tuned for registration details!</p>	<p>UCCE-Auburn 11477 E Ave Auburn, CA</p> <p>Cost TBD</p>
March 2019		
March 2	<p><b>Shepherd Skills Workshop: Pasture Lambing School</b></p> <p>A hands-on field day including information on pasture lambing systems, processing new lambs, and making efficient use of labor.</p> <p>RSVP at: <a href="http://ucanr.edu/pasturelambingschool">http://ucanr.edu/pasturelambingschool</a></p>	<p>Blue Oak Ranch Auburn, CA</p> <p>\$5/person</p>
March 20	<p><b>Foothill/Sac Valley Cattlemen's Symposium</b></p> <p>Join the Tahoe Cattlemen's Association for an information-packed morning including talks on cattle marketing, genetic selection, cattle health, and smutgrass management.</p> <p>Stay tuned for registration details!</p>	<p>Correia Live-stock Lincoln, CA</p> <p>Cost TBD</p>

## Winter/Spring Workshops Calendar

April 2019		
April 5	<p><b>Targeted Grazing Business Workshop</b></p> <p>Have you thought about starting a contract grazing business? Learn the basics about providing sheep, cattle and goats for fuel-load reduction, weed abatement, and ecological restoration projects. This full-day workshop will include a combination of hands-on learning and panel discussions with experienced graziers.</p> <p>Stay tuned for registration details!</p>	<p>Lincoln, CA</p> <p>Cost TBD</p>
April 26-27	<p><b>Beginning Farming Academy</b></p> <p>Join other beginning farmers for this intensive, 2-day workshop on the basics of getting your farm or ranch started! Topics will include business planning, economic analysis, analyzing your resources, and developing a marketing plan.</p> <p>Stay tuned for registration details!</p>	<p>UCCE-Auburn 11477 E Ave. Auburn, CA</p> <p>Cost TBD</p>
May 2019		
May 4	<p><b>Irrigated Pasture Basics</b></p> <p>Co-sponsored by the Nevada Irrigation District, the Nevada County RCD and the Placer County RCD, this morning workshop will provide information about irrigation systems, soil health, and pasture management.</p> <p>Stay tuned for registration details!</p>	<p>Robinson Ranch Penn Valley, CA</p> <p>No cost!</p>
May 17-18	<p><b>California Sheep and Goat Grazing School</b></p> <p>This 2-day, hands-on school will provide students with experience in management-intensive grazing systems using small ruminants. Topics will include grazing systems, estimating carrying capacity, electric fencing systems, predator protection, and animal husbandry.</p> <p>Stay tuned for registration details</p>	<p>Shone Farm Santa Rosa Community College</p> <p>Cost TBD</p>

**How do you prefer to get information from your local  
UC COOPERATIVE EXTENSION  
LIVESTOCK and NATURAL RESOURCES Program?**

**Please take this short survey to help me better meet  
your information needs!**

<http://ucanr.edu/livestockinfosurvey>

**For a hard copy of the survey,  
please call (530) 889-7385  
or email me at  
[dmacon@ucanr.edu](mailto:dmacon@ucanr.edu).**

**Thank you!**

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