



LIVE STOCK

companion

Volume 27: February 2026

MONTHLY TIP

Repairing hay feeding areas:

As you continue feeding hay, pay close attention to the areas taking the most damage such as feeding rings, unrolling paths, gates, and heavy traffic spots. These areas likely have exposed soil, compaction, and ruts that can quickly turn into weed and erosion problems if left alone. The next couple of weeks may offer a good opportunity to start repairs. Begin by smoothing deep tracks and leveling the surface. Light tillage or dragging may be enough in some cases. Make sure you create good soil-seed contact before reseeding.

If timing allows, consider oats or annual ryegrass for quick cover. If it's too late, summer annuals like crabgrass are a great option.

Acting early will help restore damaged areas, improve forage availability, reduce erosion and weed pressure. It will set up those areas for productive grazing later this season.

Dr. Bruno Pedreira,
Director, UT Beef & Forage
Center



“Even in February, the seeds of change are planted beneath the snow”
- John Geddes

WHEN SHOULD I SPRAY FOR WEEDS?

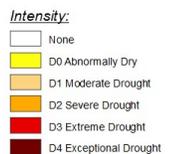
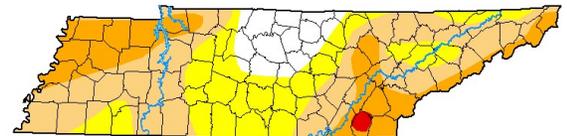
Dr. Hannah Wright-Smith, Assistant Professor, UT Extension Weed Specialist

One of the most frequently asked weed control questions I get is “When should I spray?”. The answer varies depending on the weed species life cycle and whether it is a summer or winter weed, but generally weeds should be sprayed before they flower. As plants flower, resources are sent to the reproductive growth (flowers and seeds) and the plant is sending fewer resources to vegetative growth. However, many of the herbicides we spray in forages are most active in vegetative growth, so herbicide applications made when weeds are growing new leaves and shoots are going to be most effective. Winter weeds tend to grow a little in the fall and really put on growth in late winter prior to flowering in the spring, which means the time for making the most effective herbicide applications for winter weed control is quickly coming to a close. If you haven't already made your herbicide application for winter weed control, I recommend making an application sometime in the next few weeks when it's dry enough to get in the field, daytime temperatures are at least 55°F, and it isn't freezing at night.

WEATHER

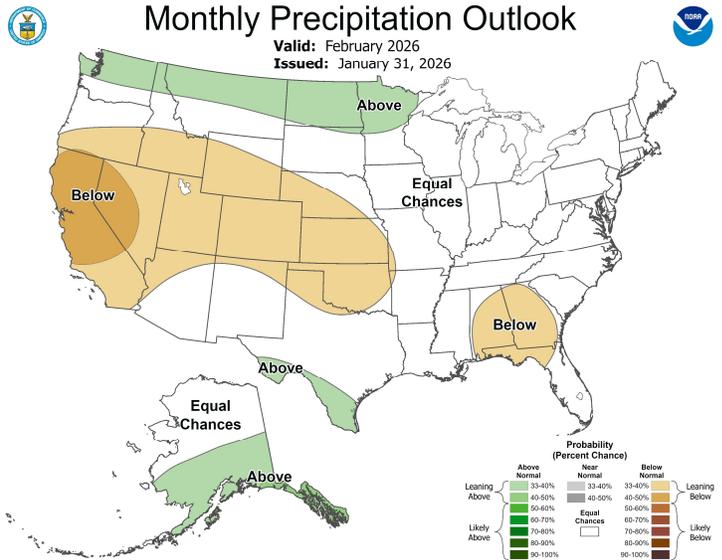
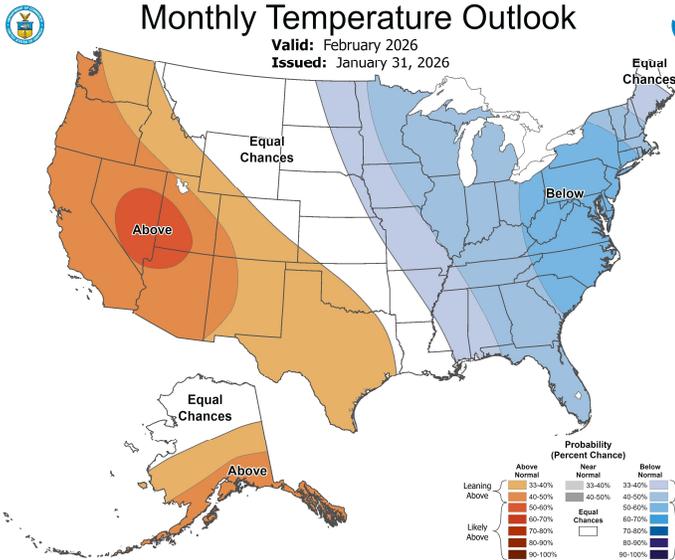
Dr. Bruno Pedreira, Director, UT Beef & Forage Center

February's average temperature was 36.3°F, which is 1.78°F below the 10-year average. Total precipitation for the month was 3.1 inches, about 1.5 inches below normal (ncei.noaa.gov).



Even though parts of Tennessee have received a few inches of snow over the past couple of weeks, drought conditions are still a concern across most of the state. Aside from a few counties in the Middle-North region, about 89% of Tennessee is experiencing some level of drought. Right now, 61% of the state is classified as D1 (moderate drought), and another 22% is in D2 (severe drought). As temperatures begin to warm over the next few weeks, limited soil moisture will likely slow pasture green-up. Producers should plan for delayed forage growth and be prepared to continue feeding hay for a few more weeks until pastures start growing consistently (droughtmonitor.unl.edu).

Looking ahead, February is expected to bring near-normal rainfall across Tennessee, with much of the state trending drier than normal. Temperatures are forecast to be cooler than average in East Tennessee, with conditions becoming slightly milder as you move west across the state.



2026 SPRING STOCKER PRODUCTION MARGINS

Dr. Andrew Griffith, Professor, UT Extension Agricultural and Resource Economics

Many stocker operations in Tennessee and the Southeast purchase calves in the spring months to graze spring and summer pasture and then market those cattle in late summer or fall. There will be strong competition for those calves this spring as fewer cattle are available to market participants, which means higher prices and a larger investment to place those cattle on pasture. Based on the purchase of a 525-pound steer and the sale of an 825-pound steer in a load lot, the expected value of gain is \$2.32 per pound.

This value of gain provides a nice opportunity to add weight to calves, but it does come with increased financial risk and can only be guaranteed with a price risk management strategy. In the same breath, cow-calf producers are being paid to add weight to calves just like the stocker producer. This market provides a tremendous



*Picture Credits: UT Extension

opportunity for both cow-calf and stocker producers who are willing to assume risk. The risk may be health, price, or financial, but there is an opportunity to reap the benefits of the risk. The question is who is willing to take the risk and who is not.

UPCOMING EVENTS

- Tennessee Forage & Grassland Council Spring Meeting –
March 3, 2026, 6-9 PM CT, Jackson, TN

Details can be found on UTBEEF.COM



Photo of the Month by Bruno Pedreira:

Recently, the Flood Recovery Team welcomed colleagues from NC State to visit areas in Tennessee affected by Hurricane Helene. The visit provided an opportunity to share updates on recovery efforts and highlight the progress that has been made so far.

This and other useful information can be found at your local UT Extension office or on UTBEEF.COM.

T BEEF & FORAGE CENTER

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