



Volume 29: April 2026

LIVE STOCK companion

MONTHLY TIP

We went to the Moon... and fertilizer prices followed!

If you haven't checked fertilizer prices in the last few weeks, you'd better take a look. Fertilizer prices have increased from 35 to 70%, depending on the source or location. I have been checking several of the most used ones, such as urea, which was in the upper \$400s and is now more towards \$780-820. This is not different for DAP and potash. Although more than 80% of our farmers are locked in their fertilizer, that doesn't apply to our livestock producers.

Well, this is the time when a soil test can help you cut back on fertilization, especially P and K fertilization. So, if you have high soil P and K levels, we can take the risk of not applying or applying less and wait for prices to come down (if that is possible!).

On the other hand, N is imperative in hayfields and more intensively grazed pastures. In this case is important to have a forage yield goal and fertilize just enough to reach it. Split applications can also increase N use efficiency. So don't just apply N fertilizers, plan before doing it.

Dr. Bruno Pedreira,
Director of the Beef & Forage Center



"April showers bring May flowers, but they also bring renewal and growth."

- Mandy Harrison

DROUGHT AND THE ROOT OF THE MATTER

Dr. Patrick Keyser, Professor and Director, Center for Native Grasslands

Seems like we are already facing drought in many parts of Tennessee. Many producers here in Tennessee and across our region are looking for ways to meet this challenge, one that keeps coming around! One tool to consider is a group of warm-season grasses – those that thrive in hot weather and are extremely drought tolerant – is our native grasses, species such as big bluestem. A study conducted by Megan Berry, a recent PhD graduate here at UTIA, found that big bluestem pastures had about twice the water-use efficiency (WUE) as those dominated by cool-season grasses such as tall fescue. What is WUE? It is simply the amount of forage produced per inch of rainfall. One reason native – and other warm-season – grasses have this ability is their basic biology and how they conduct photosynthesis. But, in the case of native grasses there is a second, very important reason – roots! Deep roots. These grasses' roots typically extend six feet down into the soil but often reach depths of eight or even ten feet! Besides the obvious contribution such deep roots can make to soil health, they also allow our native grasses to take advantage of water stored deep in the soil, water that is not available to grasses with shallower root systems typical of our cool-season forages. The combination of more efficient use of water and remarkably deep roots allow our native grasses to improve the drought resilience of our forage systems.

WEATHER UPDATE

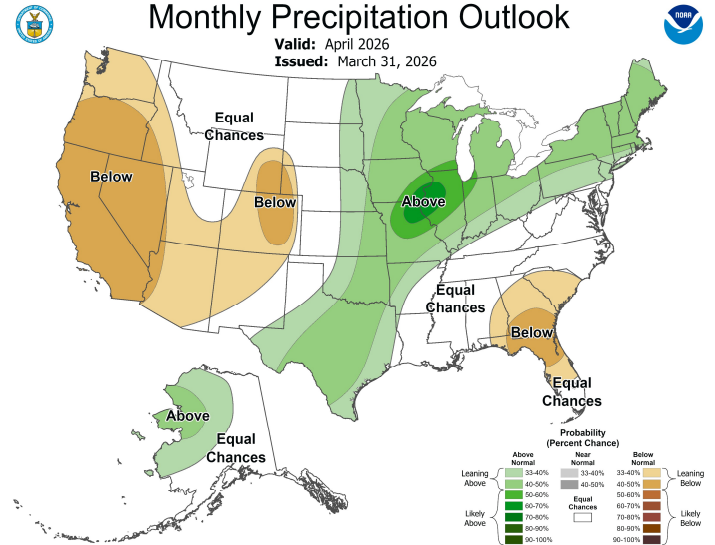
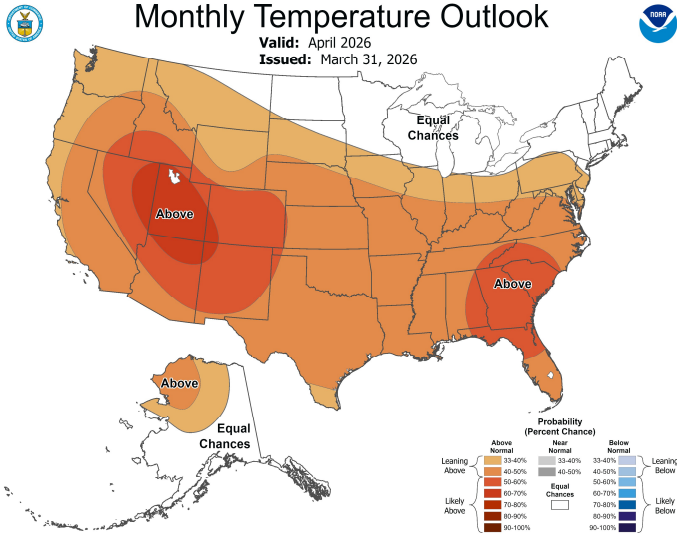
Dr. Bruno Pedreira, Director of the Beef & Forage Center

March's average temperature was 57.8 °F, about 5.5 °F below the 10-year average. Total precipitation for the month was 2.75 inches, roughly 2.8 inches below normal (ncei.noaa.gov).



Legend for drought severity:
D0 Abnormally Dry
D1 Moderate Drought
D2 Severe Drought
D3 Extreme Drought
D4 Exceptional Drought

Rainfall has been much needed across Tennessee. As of now, about 96% of the state is experiencing some level of drought. Most counties in West Tennessee are in Severe Drought (D2). In East Tennessee, a handful of counties are still not in drought, but Polk, McMinn, and Monroe counties already have areas classified as Extreme Drought (D3). Overall, about 86% of the state is in Moderate Drought (D1), with around 31% in Severe Drought (D2) (droughtmonitor.unl.edu). There is still some green forage in the field, especially annuals like oats, wheat, and cereal rye. However, perennial pastures such as fescue and orchardgrass have already had their spring growth potential reduced. If rain doesn't arrive soon, we can expect stand losses due to the prolonged dry conditions. Looking ahead, forecasts are calling for above normal temperatures with near-average rainfall. A typical March brings about 5 inches of rain, so we are still behind and will need consistent moisture to recover.



KEEPING CATTLE AND POULTRY SAFE FROM HPAI

Dr. Yang Zhao, Associate Professor & Guthrie Endowed Chair, UT Animal Science

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) continues to challenge the U.S. poultry industry, and its relevance now extends to farms that raise multiple species, especially in Tennessee where many producers raise both beef cattle and poultry. While poultry remain the primary species affected, recent detections of HPAI in U.S. dairy cattle emphasize the importance of cross-species biosecurity. For operations that manage both beef and poultry, the risk is less about beef cattle becoming infected and more about serving as a bridge for virus transmission. HPAI is commonly spread through infected birds, contaminated equipment, and environmental sources such as manure, dust, and water. On farms with multiple species, shared labor, equipment, and farm traffic can unintentionally transfer contaminated materials between poultry houses and cattle areas. Wild birds also play a major role. Farm ponds, feed bunks, and open storage areas can attract waterfowl, which may increase the chance of introducing the virus. Even if beef cattle show no clinical signs, contaminated surfaces or equipment could potentially contribute to the spread back into poultry houses, where the impact can be severe. Producers can reduce risk by strengthening everyday biosecurity. Designate separate equipment or thoroughly clean and disinfect between uses. Limit movement between poultry and cattle areas and handle poultry chores before cattle work. Restrict wild bird access to feed and water and manage farm traffic carefully. Maintaining clear separation between species and staying connected with veterinarians and Extension updates will help protect both poultry flocks and beef herds.

UPCOMING EVENTS

- **Live Stock** - Join us for our broadcast
- May 13, 2026 at 2 PM ET
- **Southeast Tennessee Beef Summit**
- April 24, 2026 at 8 AM ET
- **Beef Heifer Development School**
- May 21, 2026 at 8 AM CT

Details can be found on UTBEEF.COM



Photo of the Month by Linus Parrish:
Recovery efforts continue after Hurricane Helen in Washington County, Tennessee!

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

T BEEF & FORAGE CENTER

The University of Tennessee is an EEO/AA/Title VI/Title IX/Section 504/ADA/ADEA institution in the provision of its education and employment programs and services. All qualified applicants will receive equal consideration for employment and admission without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, pregnancy, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, physical or mental disability, genetic information, veteran status, and parental status