



(Press Release: 1 December 2016)

EFFECTS OF THE DROUGHT WILL CONTINUE

Everyone is hoping that the coming summer will have a normal, average rainfall – but the effects of the last savage drought will remain with us for several seasons. Animal numbers are down and there are therefore less surplus animals to be sold, with lower incomes for farmers. Breeding cows and ewes have or should have been cut to the minimum, so that recovery of herd & flock numbers without sacrificing quality may take several years.

This could tempt farmers to get numbers up by buying livestock once rains have fallen, but this brings its own unseen dangers. As example, a single apparently healthy cow carrying brucellosis (contagious abortion) can infect the whole herd, with dire consequences, or a single apparently healthy ram can infect the whole flock with paratuberculosis (Johne's disease), with very serious consequences. Thus, in spite of the temptations to try to make up quickly for the effects of drought, every farmer has to continue to take the right measures in these times.

- 1) Lessen the demands on recovering veld and pastures by:
 - getting rid of unproductive livestock before they lose too much condition
 - retain the minimum replacement heifers and maiden ewes
 - wean calves and lambs with extra feed to spare cows and ewes as well as veld

2) Make sure that livestock get enough quality feed by:

- using the scientifically established animal stocking rate as a maximum for the farming system
- condition scoring all breeding females and ensuring that sufficient quality feed is available for livestock needing supplementation
- sourcing and storing extra roughage if possible ahead of forecasted high demand.

The financial subvention by DAFF to mitigate the effects of the draught in the past season are gratefully acknowledged.