

Media release

Drought-related animal welfare concerns grow

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Worsening animal welfare concerns are making life increasingly difficult for drought-weary Northland farmers, prompting a plea by officials to seek help sooner rather than later.

The multi-agency Northland Drought Committee says with the region-wide drought now into its seventh month, even the best-prepared farmers are finding it increasingly difficult to ensure their stock have access to sufficient feed and water.

Mata dairy farmer Julie Jonker, a member of the Rural Support Trust, is among those working hard to ensure the needs of her farm's 250 cows are met.

Ms Jonker says despite some destocking in November and April and spending tens of thousands of dollars on extra supplement so far this season, the sheer length of the drought was still causing headaches.

“As well as dramatically reduced pasture cover overall, we're not able to graze some of our paddocks at all because the dams in those paddocks are unsafe for animals to access water.”

Ms Jonker says with the drought the worst to affect the region in decades, farmers – even very experienced ones – should not be embarrassed to seek animal welfare advice.

“The important thing is to do so sooner rather than later. There are a number of options, including splitting your herd, so that lower condition score cows can receive more supplement than those that are in better condition.”

She urged those interested in drought-related animal welfare to call 0800 778 667 or visit www.nrc.govt.nz/drought which shows how the Northland-wide drought response is being co-ordinated and what relief measures are available.

Meanwhile, Ms Jonker says while the recent rain was welcome, it would offer little long-term relief and much more was needed in many parts of Northland.

The Northland Regional Council estimates many parts of Northland – especially in the Far North – need another 100mm or so of steady rain over a two-week period to effectively break the drought's clutches.

MORE

However, short-term forecasts indicate there will be little rain over the next fortnight.

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