Farmers and ranchers in the Southern Great Plains are in a drought with conditions worsening since November. While the drought affects many of the contiguous states, the states experiencing the worst conditions are Oklahoma, Texas, Arizona and Kansas. According to the current United States Drought Monitor, the entire state of Oklahoma is in at least a moderate drought; more than 80 percent of the state is considered either in a severe or extreme drought. South of the Red River, 90 percent of Texas is in some level of drought, from abnormally dry to extreme drought.

Producers need to have contingency plans in place now to help decision-making easier as we move through the spring. Even with recent rains, we are expecting the conditions to worsen through the spring. Producers need to assess water and forage sources, keeping in mind expected forage production and water quantity to match animal demand. Immediate steps to consider taking are: buying hay while it is still available and culling cows to help mitigate further impacts to operations. It’s important for farmers and ranchers to gather their information and take steps as soon as possible. Keeping close records and knowing production costs is important in making timely and effective management decisions.

MANAGEMENT TIPS FOR DROUGHT
Find more tips online at www.noble.org/drought

Range and Pasture
- Have contingency plans in place now. It helps make decisions easier and takes the emotion out of it.
- More bare ground from overgrazing can mean more grasshoppers.

Wildlife
- Feral hogs will come to bait during drought better due to low natural foods available. This makes it easier to trap them.
- If forage is not needed for cattle, prescribed burning can be very effective to improve wildlife habitat and control woody plants.

Livestock
- Inventory water sources and determine if quantity is sufficient.
- Determine hay needs and buy early before prices increase.