



**THE VETERINARY
ASSOCIATION OF ZAMBIA**
Established by Act No. 45 of 2010

EL NIÑO ALERT · 2026–27

STRATEGY & PRACTICAL GUIDELINES

Livestock Drought Strategy 2026–2027

Protecting Zambia's herds through the El Niño season: guidance for
veterinary professionals and livestock farmers

Plan early

Count your feed and water before the
dry months bite.

Protect the core

Keep the pregnant breeding herd; sell
non-productive animals early.

Prevent disease

Vaccinate, deworm, dip and report
sudden deaths.

PART A

Guidelines for veterinary professionals

Assessment, feed budgets, nutrition, herd reduction,
disease control, surveillance

PART B

Picture guide for livestock farmers

Simple steps for small-scale and rural farmers, with
pictures

FOREWORD

A season to prepare, not to lose our herds

Zambia is entering the hottest months of the year as one of the strongest El Niño events in recent memory takes hold. The regional climate outlook for 2026/27 points to below-normal rainfall over southern and central Zambia, and Government has asked every province to activate its contingency plans.

We have lived through this before. In 1991/92, 2015/16, 2019/20 and 2023/24, drought cost livestock keepers dearly. Cattle on the floodplains collapsed and died; surviving cows failed to conceive; calves died for want of milk. Weak animals then fell to diseases that would normally have been prevented or treated.

This strategy turns the science of drought management into steps that people can act on. **Part A** gives veterinary professionals the tools to assess herds, budget feed, target supplementation, guide herd reduction and keep disease under control. **Part B** speaks directly to the small-scale rural farmer, who keeps most of Zambia's cattle and goats, using pictures and plain language.

The central message is simple: **plan early for feed and water, check body condition, group animals by need, protect the productive core of the breeding herd, and work with your veterinarian.** I call on every member of the Association, in government service, private practice, industry and academia, to carry this guidance to the farmers in their districts.

Dr Eugene C. Bwalya

President, Veterinary Association of Zambia

PURPOSE

This strategy sets out how veterinary professionals and livestock farmers in Zambia should prepare for, manage and recover from the 2026/27 El Niño drought, from feed and water planning to disease control.

WHO SHOULD USE IT

Part A veterinarians, veterinary

paraprofessionals, camp officers, nutritionists and extension staff

Part B livestock farmers, cooperatives,

herders and community leaders

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Use with local advice. Rations, products and doses must be confirmed by the attending veterinarian for each herd. Use only veterinary medicines registered by ZAMRA, and follow the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock (MFL) *Standard Treatment Guidelines for Beef and Dairy Cattle* (2025).

What this strategy covers



2026/27 El Niño
risk map



Phased triggers
and actions



Worked feed budget



Health calendar
and outbreak flow



Picture guide for
farmers



Indigenous cattle in a dry-season kraal. Image: MFL/DVS Standard Treatment Guidelines for Beef and Dairy Cattle (2025).

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HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

- **District and private vets:** read the strategy pages and Part A; use Part B pages as hand-outs at dip tanks, camps and farmer meetings.
- **Farmers and cooperatives:** start with Part B. Each page is one topic and can be printed on its own.
- **Coloured tabs** at the top of each page show who the page is for: **Strategy** **Part A**

Part B



Exotic dairy breeds and their crosses cannot graze their way through a drought: they need planned supplementation from the start.

STRATEGY AT A GLANCE

Five messages that keep animals alive

Drought management is science-based. The primary challenge is not enough feed and nutrition; disease follows hunger. Every action in this strategy flows from five core messages.



1. Plan early for feed and water

Count grazing, crop residues, hay and water now, before animals lose condition.



2. Check body condition

Score every animal monthly (1–5). Keep breeding cows at 2.5 or above.



3. Group animals by need

Lactating and late-pregnant cows need the most; dry cows the least.



4. Protect the core breeding herd

Keep pregnant cows and heifers. Sell bulls, old and non-pregnant stock early, while prices hold.



5. Work with your vet and nutritionist

Vaccinate, deworm, dip, supplement safely and report sudden deaths.

93

districts expected to experience drought in 2026/27 (Cabinet Office, 11 Sep 2026)

1.2 m

Zambians projected to face acute food insecurity, Oct 2026 – Mar 2027

84 / 116

districts whose crops were hit in the 2023/24 El Niño drought

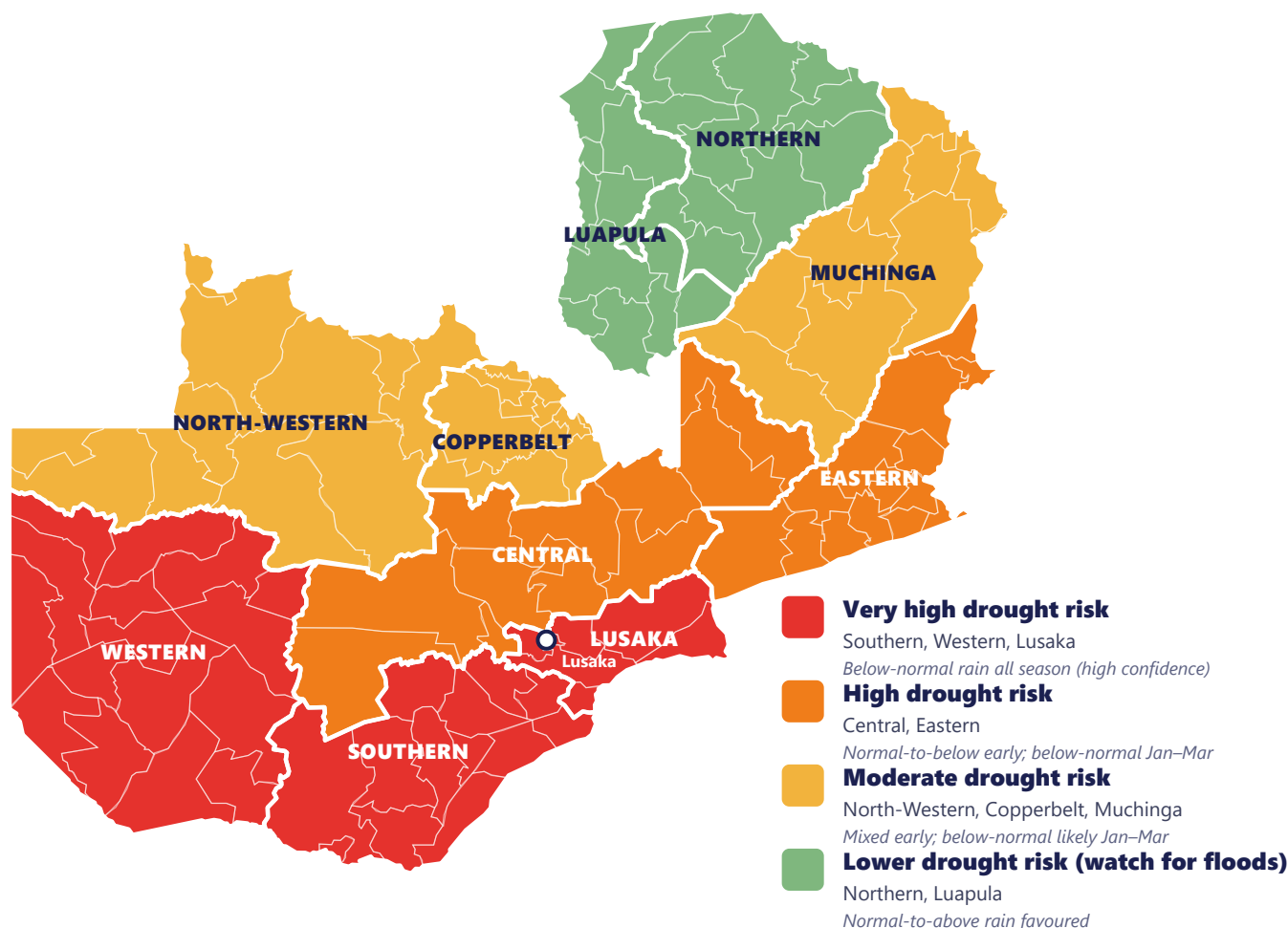
Droughts keep coming back



SECTION 1 · THE 2026/27 OUTLOOK

Where El Niño is expected to hit hardest

The Thirty-Third Southern Africa Regional Climate Outlook Forum (**SARCOF-33**, Swakopmund, 25–28 August 2026) reported that El Niño is established and expected to strengthen to **strong to very strong** intensity, peaking around October–December 2026. For Zambia this produces a **north–south split**: wetter in the far north, drier across the south and, later in the season, across most of the country. Above-normal temperatures are expected over most of the region from October 2026 to January 2027.



Livestock drought-risk tiers by province, based on the SARCOF-33 seasonal outlook. Thin white lines are district boundaries. District targeting follows the Zambia Meteorological Department (ZMD) seasonal forecast and the Disaster Management and Mitigation Unit (DMMU) district lists.

Seasonal rainfall outlook for Zambia, by period

Zone of Zambia	Oct–Dec 2026	Nov–Jan	Dec–Feb	Jan–Mar 2027
North (Northern, Luapula, N. Muchinga)	N–A	A	N–A	N–A*
Centre (Central, Copperbelt, N-Western, Eastern)	N–B	N–B	N–B	B
South (Southern, Western, Lusaka)	B	B	B	B

A = above normal · N–A = normal to above · N–B = normal to below · B = below normal (high confidence in the south). *Jan–Mar: normal to above only in the extreme north; below normal over the bulk of Zambia. Source: SARCOF-33 Statement, SADC Climate Services Centre, August 2026.

What this means for livestock: the main cattle areas of Southern, Western, Central and Lusaka Provinces face poor pasture regrowth, early drying of water points and a long hungry period that may run to the next harvest. Northern areas may instead see waterlogging, foot rot, liver fluke and tick-borne disease. Both need preparation now.

SECTION 2 · WHY A DROUGHT STRATEGY?

How drought harms livestock

Cattle, sheep, goats and wildlife depend on natural grass, browse and water. In good years, crop residues carry them through the dry season at little cost. When rains fail, eight problems arrive together and feed on one another.



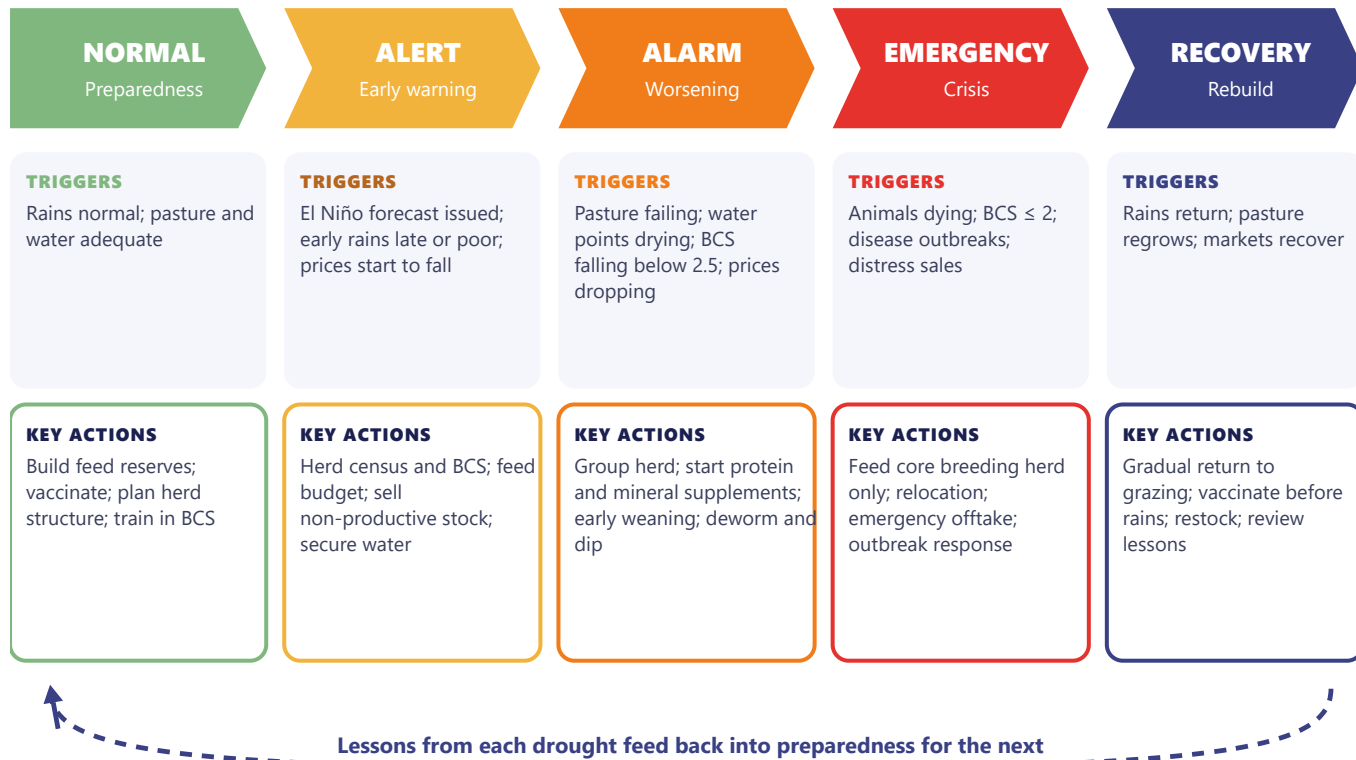
The vicious cycle. Hunger weakens immunity, weak animals get sick, and sick animals eat less and lose condition faster. Breaking the cycle early, through feed planning and disease prevention, costs far less than treating it late.

The result if we do nothing: high mortality, more disease, failed breeding (cows in a catabolic state do not cycle), calves lost for lack of milk, distress sales at low prices and a real threat to the national herd.

SECTION 3 · DROUGHT CYCLE MANAGEMENT

Act on triggers, not on hope

Drought develops slowly. The earlier a farmer acts, the cheaper and more effective each action is. This strategy follows the drought-cycle approach used in the international *Livestock Emergency Guidelines and Standards* (LEGS): each phase has clear triggers and matching actions.



Where are we now? (October 2026)

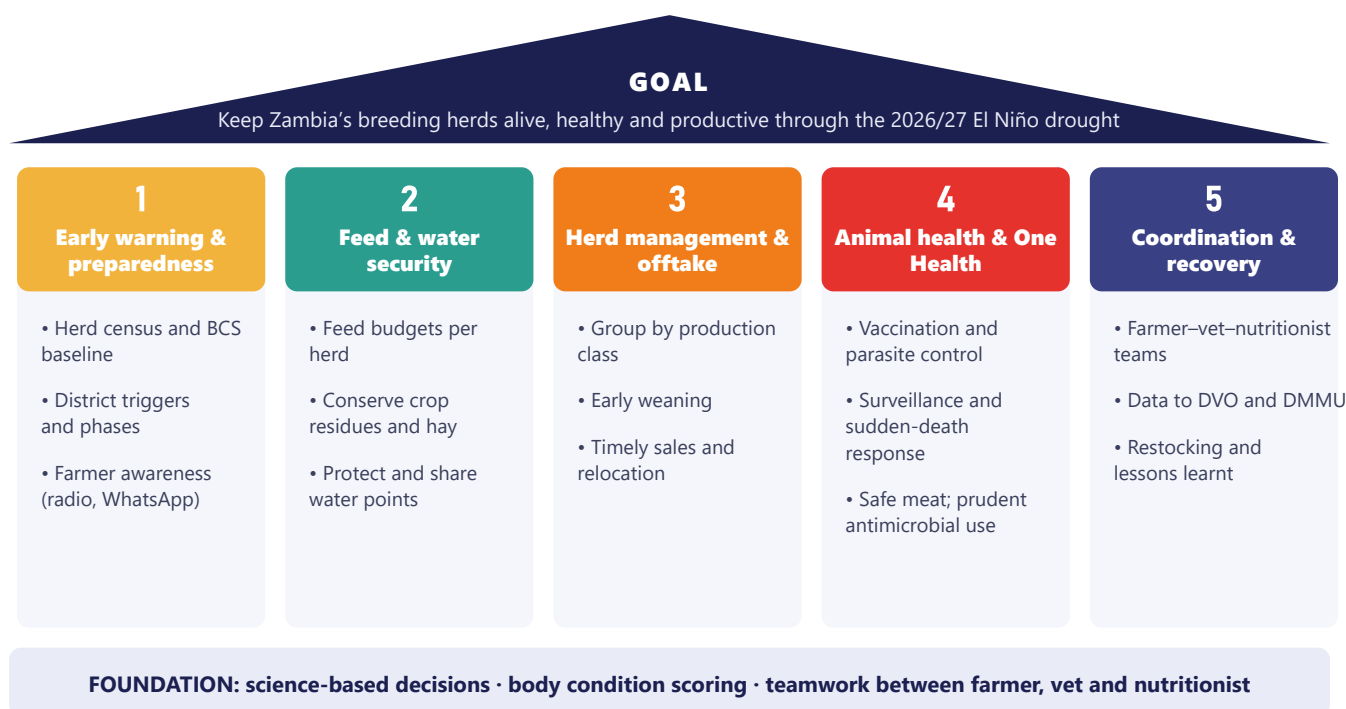


Who declares a phase? Phase changes are agreed at district level by the District Veterinary Officer with the District Disaster Management Committee, using rainfall (ZMD), pasture, water, body condition, market and disease data. VAZ members feed field data into this process (see A8).

SECTION 4 · STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

One goal, five pillars

The strategy is organised around five pillars. Part A turns each pillar into technical protocols for veterinary professionals; Part B turns them into simple farm actions.



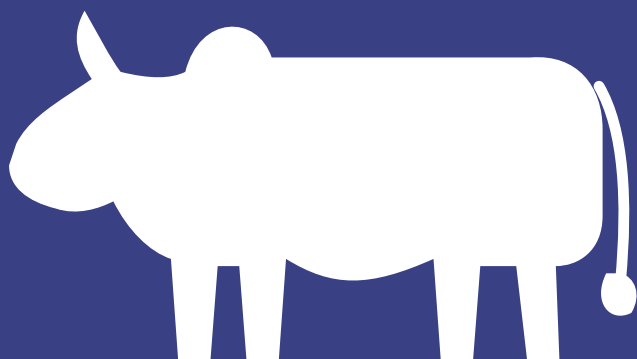
Expected results by June 2027

Pillar	Result we want	How we will know
1 Early warning	Farmers in high-risk districts receive drought advice before December 2026	Radio and WhatsApp reach; number of farmer meetings held
2 Feed and water	Herds have a written or verbal feed budget; crop residues are conserved, not burnt	Feed budgets completed by vets and para-vets
3 Herd management	Non-productive animals sold early; breeding cows kept at BCS 2.5 or above	Monthly BCS records; sales before price collapse
4 Animal health	No preventable outbreaks; sudden deaths reported and investigated within 24 hours	Vaccination coverage; outbreak reports; anthrax cases in people
5 Coordination	Field data reach the DVO and DMMU every month; recovery plans ready by May 2027	Monthly reports; recovery plan documents

PART A

Guidelines for veterinary professionals

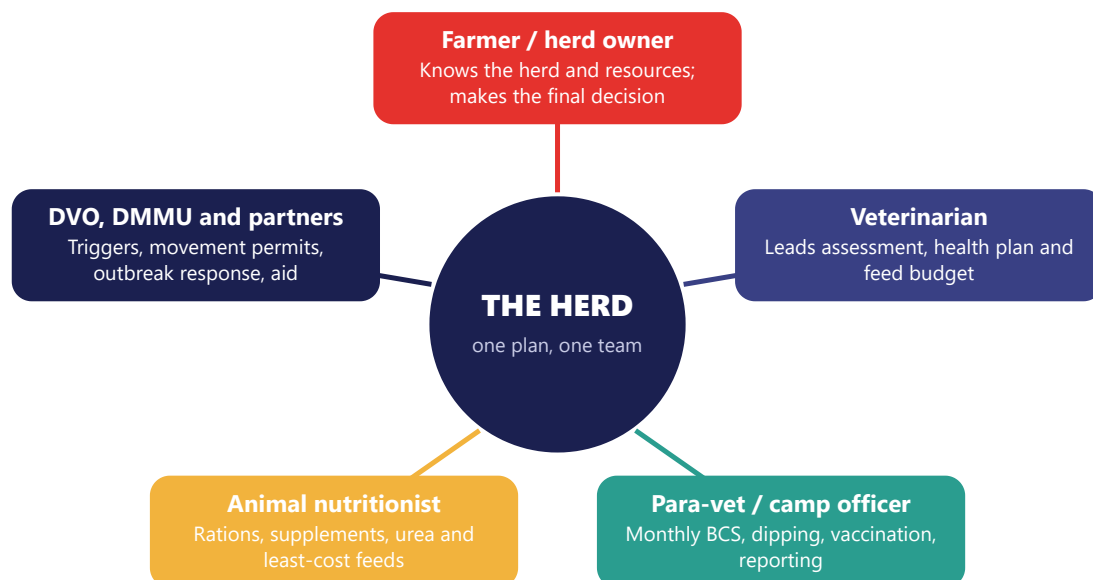
Veterinarians · veterinary paraprofessionals · camp extension officers ·
animal nutritionists



A1 · ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The drought team

A workable drought strategy needs the farmer, the veterinarian and the nutritionist to work as one team, and to agree on how needs vary by breed, age, sex and production stage.



Task	Farmer	Vet	Para-vet / camp	Nutritionist	DVO / DMMU
Herd census and grouping	L	S	S		I
Body condition scoring	S	L	L		I
Feed and water inventory	L	S	S	S	
Feed budget and rations	S	L		L	
Herd reduction and sales	L	S			S
Relocation and movement permits	L	S	S		L
Vaccination and parasite control	S	L	L		S
Disease reporting and outbreaks	S	L	L		L
Monthly data and phase triggers		L	S		L

L = leads · S = supports · I = is informed. DVO = District Veterinary Officer; DMMU = Disaster Management and Mitigation Unit.

What the team must agree on: breed, age and sex

BREED

Indigenous breeds (Tonga, Barotse, Angoni) graze and browse widely and survive best. Exotic breeds and crosses need supplements or full substitution.

AGE

Young stock need less but die more easily: an immature rumen and short height limit browse. Cattle over about 8 years lose teeth and need soft, palatable feed.

SEX & STAGE

Females in production need the most. The cow with a calf at foot and the heavily pregnant cow have the highest requirements.

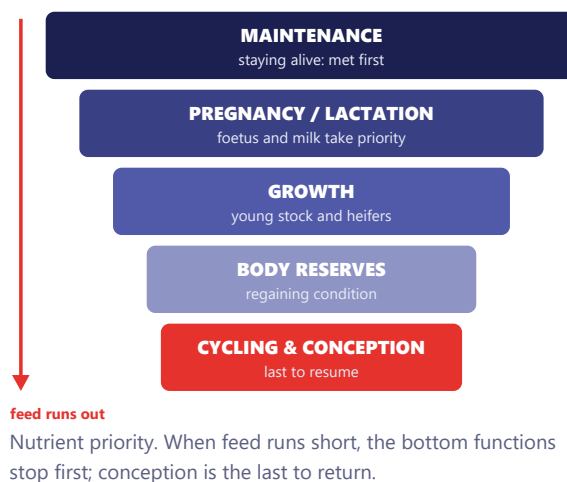
A2 · NUTRITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

Maintenance first, production second

Cattle eat for two reasons: **maintenance** (staying alive, with no gain or loss of weight) and **production** (growth, pregnancy, lactation and reproduction). Most cow deaths in drought come from unmet maintenance needs: the animal breaks down its body reserves until it dies.

When feed is short, production shuts down in order. A non-pregnant cow will not conceive until intake exceeds maintenance. A pregnant or lactating cow, however, diverts nutrients to the foetus or milk, **even those needed for her own maintenance**. This is why pregnant and lactating cows go thin first while dry cows hold condition.

Dry-matter intake (DMI). Cattle eat about **2–3% of body weight as dry matter** a day (a 400 kg cow: about 10–12 kg DM). Green grass is about 80% water, so 1 kg DM = about 5 kg fresh grass. Dry standing grass, hay and stover are only 10–15% water, so 1 kg DM ≈ 1.15 kg.



Young stock and heifers: daily needs

Class	Mass (kg)	DMI (kg)	Maint. energy (MJ ME)	Maint. protein (g)	ADG 0.5 kg: energy (MJ ME)	ADG 0.5 kg: protein (g)
Calf	150	4.3	22	230	38	515
Weaner	200	5.3	27	300	44	555
Replacement heifer	320	7.6	38	425	61	665
Pregnant heifer	380	8.6	43	488	66	720
Pregnant heifer	420	9.3	47	524	71	785

Adult cows: daily needs

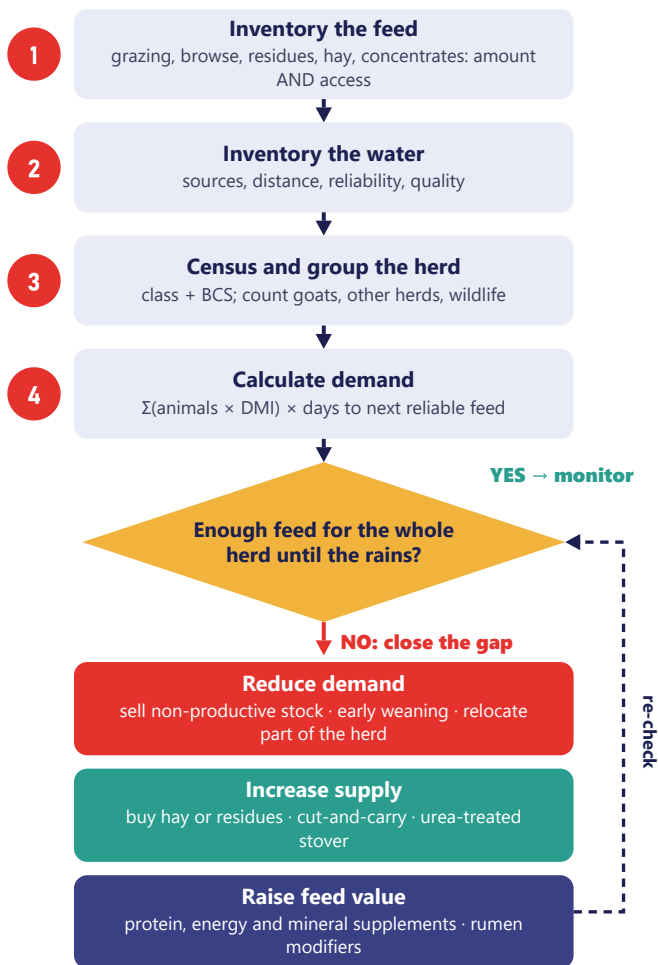
Class	Mass (kg)	DMI (kg)	Maint. energy (MJ ME)	Maint. protein (g)	Extra energy, BCS 2→2.5 (MJ ME)
Dry cow, not pregnant	450	9.8	54	390	2
	550	11.3	63	450	
Lactating, post-calving	450	12.7	76	860	11
	550	14.7	85	970	
Mid-pregnancy (middle third)	450	9.8	54	390	4
	550	11.3	63	450	
Late pregnancy (last third)	450	9.8	64	480	7
	550	11.3	73	540	

ADG = average daily gain; MJ ME = megajoules of metabolisable energy. The lactating cow (highlighted) has the highest demand; the dry, non-pregnant cow the lowest.

A3 · FEED BUDGETING

Will the feed last until the rains?

Once the herd is grouped and scored, check whether available feed is enough to keep it healthy through the drought. If not, act **before** animals lose condition.



WORKED EXAMPLE: A 23-HEAD HERD

Group	kg DM/day	Total
6 lactating cows (450 kg)	6 × 12.7	76.2
6 cows, late pregnancy (450 kg)	6 × 9.8	58.8
4 replacement heifers (320 kg)	4 × 7.6	30.4
4 weaner steers (200 kg)	4 × 5.3	21.2
2 old cows, dry (450 kg)	2 × 9.8	19.6
1 old bull (~550 kg)	1 × 11.3	11.3
Daily demand		217.5
Demand for 150 days		32.6 t
Supply: grazing ≈ 12 t + stored stover 4 t		16.0 t
Gap		-16.6 t (51%)

Step 1 · Sell early: 2 old cows, the old bull and 4 steers (~52.1 kg/day): saves 7.8 t. Gap 8.8 t.

Step 2 · Secure feed: 5 t hay, groundnut haulms or stover. Gap 3.8 t.

Step 3 · Early-wean 6 calves at 4 months: cows drop to about 9.8 kg/day, saving about 2.1 t over 120 days. Gap 1.7 t, closed with protein supplement or a vetted relocation of the heifers.

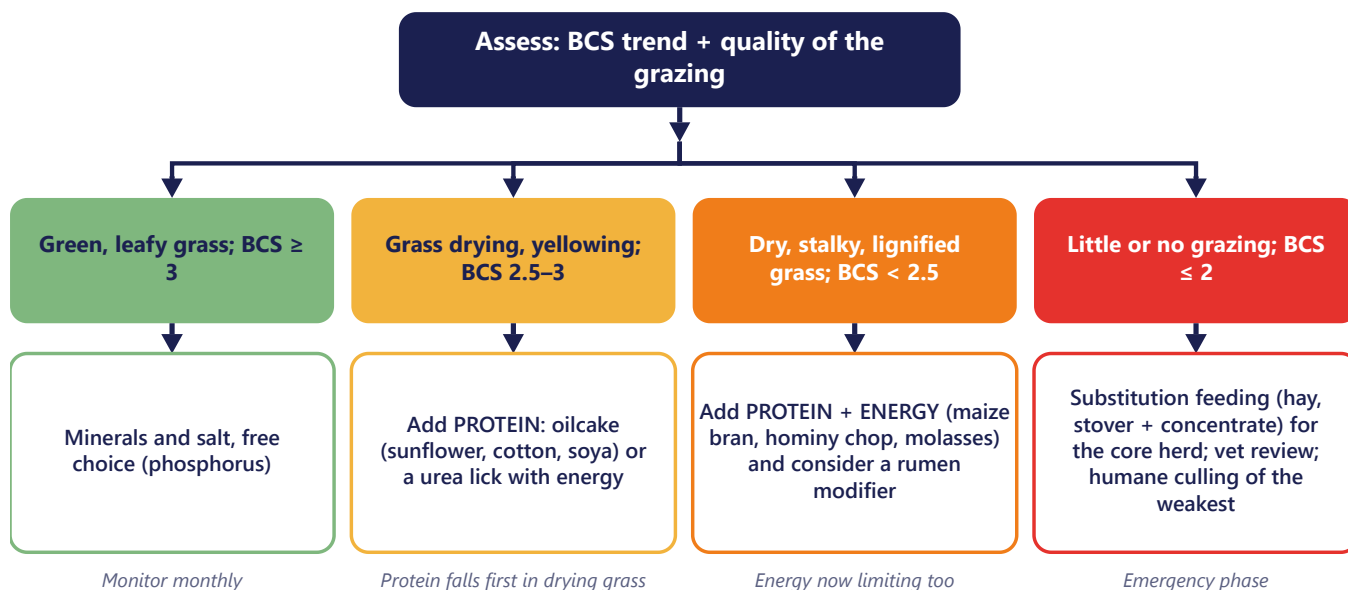
Weaned calves need good-quality creep feed, budgeted separately. Price the options before choosing.

Estimating standing grazing. Walk transects and clip and weigh sample quadrats, or use local carrying-capacity norms with the extension officer. Discount for trampling and wastage (usually 30–50% of standing feed is not eaten).

A4 · NUTRITION INTERVENTIONS

Supplement what the grass is missing

The feed tables assume the grass still holds some energy and protein. As grass dries and becomes lignified, **protein falls first, then energy**. Supplements must follow that decline.



Urea (non-protein nitrogen): cheap, effective, and potentially fatal.

- Ruminants only. Never feed to calves under about 4 months, pigs, poultry, horses or donkeys.
- Always feed with an energy source (maize bran, molasses) and minerals.
- Introduce gradually over 2–3 weeks. Keep urea to no more than 1% of total daily dry-matter intake, and mix it thoroughly.
- Never dissolve in the drinking water of hungry or thirsty animals; never let animals gorge on a lick.
- Feed every day. After a break of 2 days or more, restart from a low dose.
- **Poisoning signs** (within 30–60 min): twitching, frothing, staggering, bloat, collapse. **First aid:** 4 L of 5% acetic acid (vinegar) by mouth for an adult, plus cold water; call the vet at once.

VITAMINS AND MINERALS

Provide a salt-based mineral and vitamin lick **free choice at all times**; animals regulate their own intake. **Phosphorus** is critical: deficient cattle chew bones and carcasses (pica) and risk **botulism**.

RUMEN MODIFIERS

Browse and dry grass carry tannins and resins that depress rumen microbes. **Tannin-binding and fibre-digestion additives**, given in feed or water, can maintain appetite and digestion and soften dung. Use registered products only, on veterinary or nutritionist advice.

Stretch crop residues: chop maize stover and treat with urea (about 4 kg urea in 40 L water per 100 kg stover; seal airtight for about 3 weeks) to raise protein and digestibility, under extension guidance.

A5 · REDUCING DEMAND

Herd reduction, early weaning and relocation

If the feed budget shows a deficit, reduce nutritional demand by reducing numbers. This works best **early, before animals lose condition and before prices fall**. The guiding principle: keep the breeding herd intact as far as possible.

ORDER OF REMOVAL: START AT STEP 1 AND STOP WHEN THE BUDGET BALANCES



7. Core breeding herd: pregnant cows

PROTECT

6. Replacement heifers: pregnant only

KEEP

5. Keep heifers 1–2 years (cull poor conformation)

KEEP

4. Keep heifers 7–12 months (cull poor conformation)

KEEP

3. Early-wean calves at 4 months

ACT

2. Fatten culls (old cows, steers, bulls) and sell early

SELL

1. Sell older bulls (or all bulls)

SELL

Supporting the sale decision

- Selling non-productive animals early protects cash flow and herd value; it is a financial as well as a welfare decision.
- Link farmers to abattoirs, feedlots and livestock markets early; encourage group sales through cooperatives for better prices.
- Animals in poor condition that cannot be sold or fed should be **humanely slaughtered** for home consumption, after veterinary inspection, rather than left to die.
- Early weaning (about 4 months) lets cows hold condition and rebreed; weaned calves need good-quality creep feed, clean water and shade.

RELOCATION AUDIT (ZAMBIAN CONTEXT)

Moving the herd to a relative's village, the floodplains or river banks is common. Before moving, check:

- **Carrying capacity** of the destination: walk it and audit the feed and water actually there.
- **Competing herds**: other cattle, goats and wildlife already grazing the area.
- **Disease status**: FMD, CBPP and ECF zones; tsetse; anthrax history.
- **Movement permit** from the DVO; vaccinate, dip and deworm before moving.
- **Herding, theft and conflict** risks; water on the route; distance for weak animals.

A6 · DISEASE PREVENTION

Animal health calendar and parasite control

Illness burns energy and condition the animal cannot spare. Prevention is the final, essential layer of the strategy: vaccination, internal and external parasite control, minerals and support of rumen function.

	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Anthrax vaccination (annual)									
Blackquarter (young stock 6 m – 2 y)									
Botulism (esp. if bone-chewing)									
Haemorrhagic septicaemia / pasteurellosis									
Lumpy skin disease and three-day stiff sickness									
FMD, CBPP, ECF (ITM): as directed by DVS									
Strategic deworming (roundworms)									
Liver fluke treatment (triclabendazole)									
Dipping / spraying (weekly; more in rains)									
Mineral lick (free choice)									
Body condition scoring									

Nov–Mar is the expected hungry period in the south. Vaccinate before the rains, and before animals become too weak to respond. Calendar for 2026/27. Adjust to local disease history, product label and DVS programmes; use ZAMRA-registered vaccines and medicines only.

ROUNDWORMS & TAPEWORMS

Stress lets worms take over. Use a well-chosen broad-spectrum dewormer strategically so animals do not share scarce nutrients with parasites. Dose by weight (use a weigh band), and check efficacy if resistance is suspected.

LIVER FLUKE

Shrinking water bodies concentrate snails and cattle, so fluke infestation rises. Use a **triclabendazole**-based flukicide, which acts on immature and adult flukes. A healthy liver underpins appetite, metabolism and immunity.

TICKS & TICK-BORNE DISEASE

Mixing herds and nutritional stress raise ECF, babesiosis, anaplasmosis and heartwater. **Dip weekly.** Check the active ingredient, keep amitraz dips correctly lime-stabilised, and use up to 3 L of wash per adult when hand-spraying. Carrier animals look healthy.

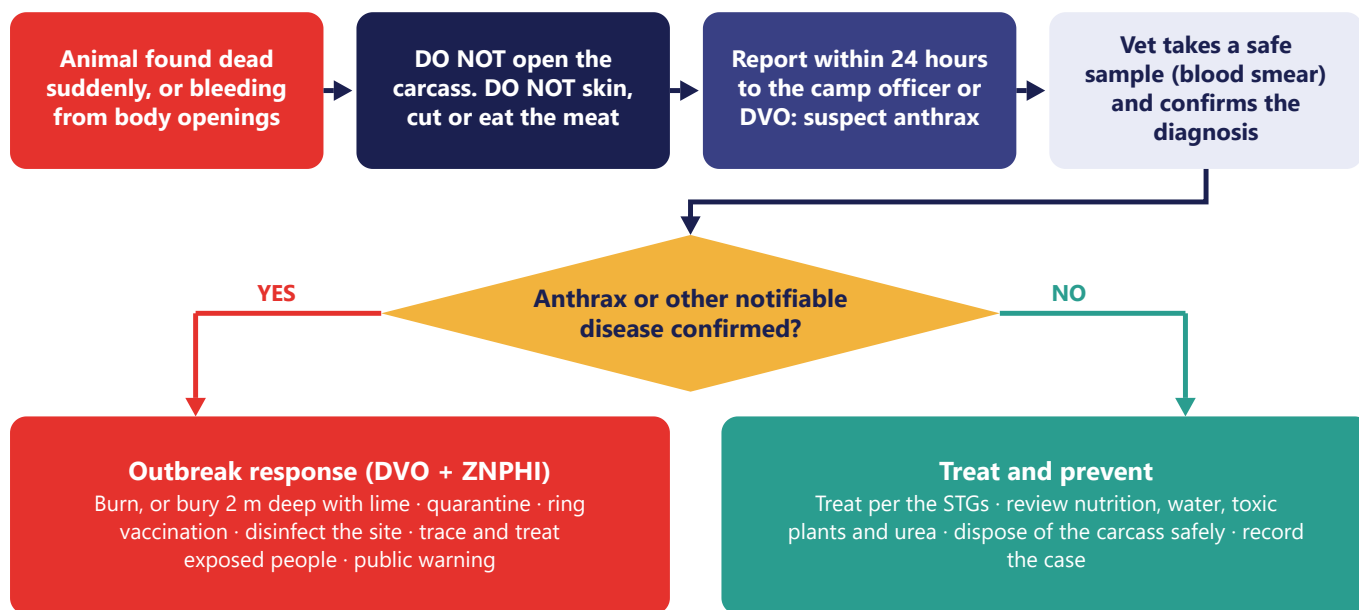
Prudent antimicrobial use. Antibiotics do not cure hunger. Treat only diagnosed bacterial disease, follow the MFL *Standard Treatment Guidelines for Beef and Dairy Cattle* (2025), observe withdrawal periods before slaughter or milk sale, and record every treatment. This protects people from residues and slows antimicrobial resistance.

A7 · SURVEILLANCE AND ONE HEALTH

Sudden deaths, notifiable diseases and safe meat

Drought raises the risk of diseases of national importance (FMD, CBPP, bovine TB, anthrax) through crowding at water, contact with buffalo, disturbed soil and herd movement. It also raises human exposure, as hungry households eat animals that died.

SUDDEN-DEATH RESPONSE FLOW FOR VETERINARY STAFF AND PARA-VETS



PRIORITY SURVEILLANCE

- **Anthrax:** sudden deaths, especially near drying rivers, dambos and wildlife areas
- **FMD and CBPP:** lesions, lameness, coughing in moving or mixing herds
- **Tick-borne disease:** ECF, babesiosis, anaplasmosis, heartwater
- **Botulism:** paralysis in bone-chewing (phosphorus-deficient) cattle
- **Poisoning:** toxic plants eaten by hungry animals; urea; algae in stagnant water
- **Heat stress:** panting, drooling, collapse; handle and move animals in the cool hours

Protect people. Never eat, sell or give away meat from animals that died or were sick. Use the meat inspection service. Anthrax causes skin sores, gut and lung disease in people; send anyone exposed to the nearest health facility.

One Health link. Share animal outbreak signals with the District Health Office and ZNPHI through the joint surveillance channels, so human cases are found early.

Carcass disposal. Where anthrax is not suspected, bury carcasses away from water sources or burn them; do not leave them for dogs and scavengers, which spread disease.

A8 · MONITORING AND REPORTING

Measure, report, adjust

There are two ways to measure nutritional status: **body condition score** and **weight change**. BCS is the practical gold standard because it shows the animal's current state without repeated weighing.

Indicator	Frequency	Who collects	Trigger
Rainfall vs. normal	Dekadal (10-day)	ZMD / DVO	< 75% of normal for 2 dekads → Alert
Pasture condition	Monthly	Camp officer	Grass grey/dry, little regrowth → Alarm
Water point status	Fortnightly	Para-vet / farmers	Walking distance doubled; pools drying → Alarm
Herd BCS distribution	Monthly	Para-vet / vet	> 20% of cows below 2.5 → Alarm; below 2 → Emergency
Mortality	Weekly	Camp officer	Above seasonal normal; any sudden deaths → investigate
Cattle price vs. maize price	Monthly	DVO / market	Falling cattle-to-grain terms of trade → Alert
Disease reports	Immediate + weekly	Vet / DVO	Any notifiable disease → outbreak response
Farmer reach	Monthly	VAZ members	Meetings, radio and WhatsApp reach in high-risk districts

Monthly herd monitoring sheet (photocopy for each herd)

Farmer: _____ Camp / village: _____ District: _____ Month: _____

Group	Number	BCS 1	BCS 2	BCS 3	BCS 4–5	Deaths / sold / treated
Cows with calf at foot						
Cows, late pregnancy						
Cows, dry						
Heifers (pregnant)						
Heifers (open)						
Weaners / calves						
Bulls and steers						
Goats and sheep						

Water source and distance: _____ Feed on hand (est. tonnes DM): _____ Supplements fed: _____

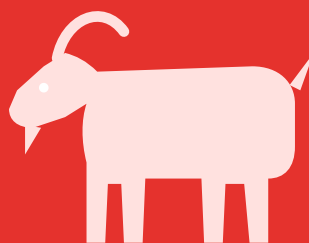
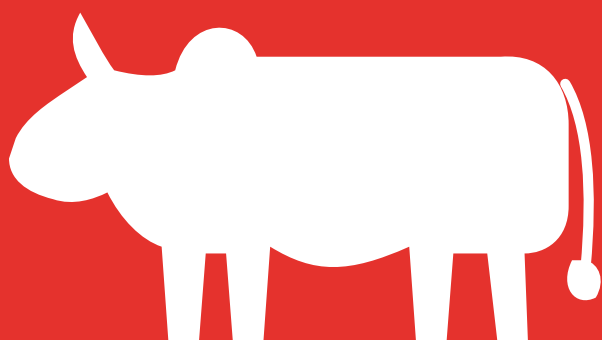
Diseases or sudden deaths observed: _____ Officer's signature: _____

Data flow: farmer → para-vet / camp officer (monthly sheet) → DVO (district summary and phase recommendation) → Provincial Veterinary Officer, DVS and DMMU. VAZ members in private practice are encouraged to share summaries with the DVO.

PART B

Picture guide for livestock farmers

For small-scale and rural farmers, herders, cooperatives and community
leaders



PART B · FOR FARMERS

Ten golden rules for the dry season

This year the rains are likely to be poor, especially in the South, West and Centre of Zambia. Follow these ten rules to keep your animals alive.



1 Save feed now

Keep maize stalks, groundnut and bean leaves. Do not burn them.



2 Protect water

Fence and clean water points. Give water every day.



3 Look at your animals

Check how thin or fat they are every month.



4 Make groups

Put animals with the same needs together.



5 Sell early

Sell old, sick and extra animals while prices are good.



6 Keep the mothers

Pregnant cows and heifers are your future herd.



7 Vaccinate

Before the rains, and before animals get weak.



8 Dip every week

Ticks spread deadly diseases. Deworm too.



9 Never eat dead animals

Report sudden deaths to the vet at once.



10 Call your vet

Ask your vet or camp officer before you act.

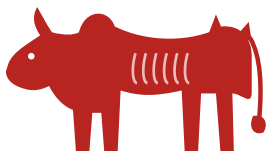
Remember: it is cheaper to keep an animal alive than to replace it. Act early.

B1 · BODY CONDITION

Is my animal too thin?

Look at your cattle from the side and from behind every month. Look at the ribs, the backbone and the hip bones. Give each animal a score from 1 (very thin) to 5 (very fat).

1

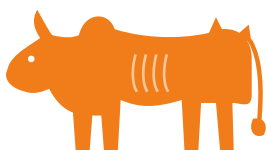


VERY THIN

Ribs, spine and hip bones stick out sharply

► **DANGER: call the vet now. Feed the best you have, or sell / slaughter**

2



THIN

Ribs easy to see; hip bones show

► **Give extra feed and lick now. Check worms and ticks**

3

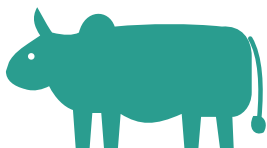


GOOD

Ribs just covered; smooth back

► **Keep it so. Check every month**

4

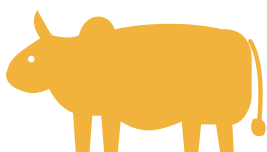


FAT

Round body; ribs not seen

► **Good. Feed the thin ones first**

5



VERY FAT

Very round; fat at tail

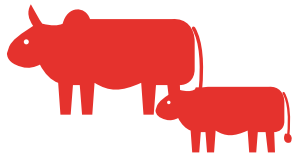
► **Rare in drought. Cut extra feed**

TARGET: keep cows at 3 (never below 2½). A cow should be about 3½ when she calves.

B2 · GROUP YOUR HERD

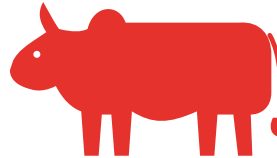
Put animals with the same needs together

Not every animal needs the same feed. Mothers feeding a calf, and cows about to give birth, need the most. Put them in groups so the best feed goes where it is needed.



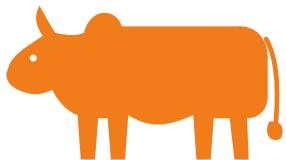
Cows with a calf

NEED THE MOST FEED



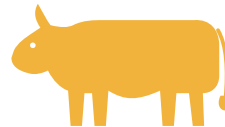
Cows heavily pregnant

NEED A LOT



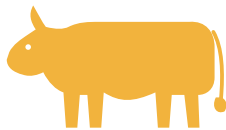
Pregnant heifers

NEED A LOT, still growing



Young heifers

NEED GOOD FEED to grow



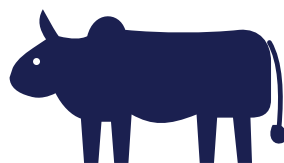
Weaned calves

need soft, good feed



Dry cows (not pregnant)

NEED THE LEAST



Bulls, steers, old cows

SELL EARLY

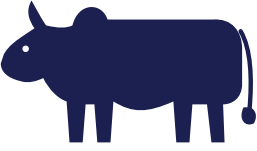
Feed first: cows with calves, heavily pregnant cows and pregnant heifers. They are the future of your herd.

Wean early: if mothers are getting thin, take calves off milk at about 4 months, with your vet's advice. The mother can then keep her strength.

B3 · FEED AND WATER

Count your feed: will it last until the rains?

Each animal needs dry feed and water every day. Add up what your herd needs, and compare it with the feed you have.

 Cow  dry feed / day 12 kg  water / day 40–60 L	 Young heifer  dry feed / day 8 kg  water / day 25–40 L	 Calf  dry feed / day 4 kg  water / day 10–20 L	 Goat or sheep  dry feed / day 1–1½ kg  water / day 4–8 L
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Quick sum: one cow eats about 12 kg of dry feed a day. From November to March (150 days) that is about **1.8 tonnes for ONE cow**. Ten cows need about 18 tonnes. Do you have it?

Good feeds to save and use



Maize stalks
(stover)



Hay cut early
and stored



Oilcake:
sunflower,
cotton, soya



Tree pods and
leaves

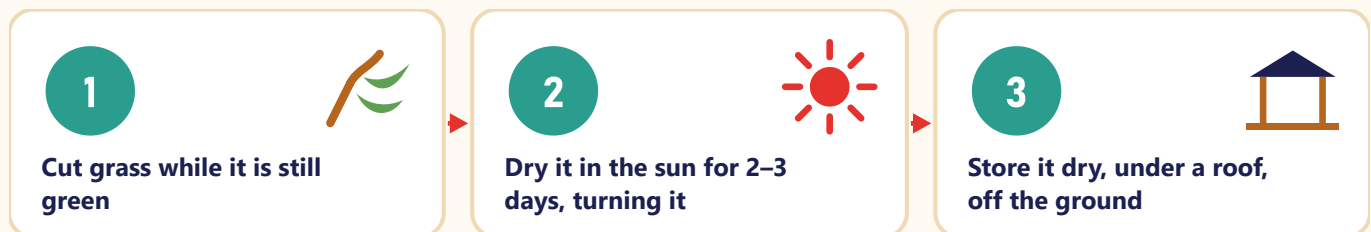


Mineral and salt
lick



Store feed under
a roof

Make and keep your own hay



Water: in hot weather give water every day, in clean troughs. Keep animals out of muddy pools: they carry liver fluke and anthrax. Water and graze in the cool hours; give shade.

Urea is poison if used wrongly. Only use urea in feed or licks after your vet or extension officer shows you how. Never put it in drinking water.

B4 · KEEP OR SELL?

Protect the mothers, sell the rest early

If you do not have enough feed, sell some animals **now**, while they are still in good shape and prices are good. Waiting means thin animals and low prices.



KEEP & FEED



Pregnant cows



Pregnant heifers



Young heifers (good shape)



SELL EARLY



Old bulls



Old or barren cows



Steers and extra males

Selling together through your cooperative can get you a better price. A weak animal that cannot be fed should be slaughtered safely, with the vet's approval, not left to die.

Moving your animals to a relative, the plains or the river? Six checks first



Visit the new place first

Is there enough grass and water?



Count other herds

How many cattle, goats and wild animals are there?



Check diseases there

Ask the vet about FMD, CBPP, ticks and tsetse.



Get a movement permit

From the District Veterinary Office.



Vaccinate, dip, deworm

Before you move the animals.



Plan the journey

Water on the road; do not walk weak animals far.

B5 · ANIMAL HEALTH

Protect your animals from disease

Hungry animals get sick easily. Sickness wastes the little feed they eat. Four things keep them strong:



Vaccinate

Anthrax, blackquarter, botulism, lumpy skin: before the rains



Dip every week

Ticks kill with East Coast fever



Deworm

Worms and liver fluke steal the feed



Give a lick

Salt and minerals every day

Call the vet or camp officer at once if you see:



Not eating, standing alone



Very thin and weak, cannot stand



High fever, fast breathing



Swellings, wounds or lumps on skin



Bleeding from nose, mouth or anus



Shaking, frothing, falling down



Sores in mouth or on feet, limping



Sudden death of any animal



NEVER eat, sell or cut an animal that died suddenly

It may be ANTHRAX, which kills animals and makes people very sick.

Do not open it. Keep people and dogs away. Call the vet the same day.

Use only medicines from registered agro-vet shops. Follow the dose on the label and ask your vet before using antibiotics. Do not sell milk or meat from treated animals until the waiting time is over.

B6 · RECOVERY

When the rains return

The danger is not over when the rain falls. Weak animals can die from sudden changes in feed, and diseases rise in the wet season.

1



Go slowly onto green grass

Mix with dry feed for 1–2 weeks to avoid bloat and diarrhoea.

2



Vaccinate before and with the rains

Lumpy skin, three-day sickness, blackquarter.

3



Dip more often

Ticks increase fast when rains come.

4



Keep checking condition

Thin cows need time before they can get pregnant again.

5



Rebuild carefully

Buy healthy animals with papers; quarantine and vaccinate them.

6



Plan for next time

Grow fodder, store hay, keep a feed reserve.



- ✓ Plan feed and water early
- ✓ Score body condition monthly
- ✓ Sell extra animals early
- ✓ Vaccinate, dip, deworm
- ✓ Report sick and dead animals



- X Burn crop residues
- X Wait until animals are very thin
- X Eat animals that died
- X Use urea without training
- X Move animals without a permit

IMPLEMENTATION

Plan of action, October 2026 – June 2027

The Association will work with the Department of Veterinary Services (MFL), DMMU, ZNPHI, cooperating partners and the private sector to put this strategy into practice in the highest-risk districts first.



WHAT VAZ WILL DO

- Publish this strategy and the farmer picture guide on the VAZ website and social media, free to download and print.
- Mobilise members in every province to run farmer meetings at dip tanks, camps and markets.
- Use partner radio stations for drought-advice programmes in local languages.
- Run a CPD webinar for members on drought nutrition, feed budgeting and outbreak response.
- Share field observations with DVS and DMMU, and advocate for targeted feed and vaccine support.

WHAT WE ASK OF PARTNERS

- **Government:** timely district forecasts, movement permits, vaccine availability, and support for offtake and feed reserves.
- **Industry and agro-dealers:** affordable, registered supplements, licks and vaccines in rural outlets; buy-back and fattening schemes.
- **Cooperatives and NGOs:** group marketing, fodder banks and water-point rehabilitation.
- **Media:** carry the farmer messages in local languages.

REFERENCES · GLOSSARY · CONTACTS

Sources and further reading

REFERENCES

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5. FAO. Guidance on livestock-related interventions during emergencies, and on urea treatment of crop residues. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Rome.
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GLOSSARY

BCS	Body condition score, 1 (very thin) to 5 (very fat)
DM / DMI	Dry matter / dry-matter intake: feed with all water removed
MJ ME	Megajoules of metabolisable energy
NPN	Non-protein nitrogen, e.g. urea
Early weaning	Removing calves from milk at about 4 months
Offtake	Planned sale or slaughter to reduce herd size
ITM	Infection and treatment method of immunisation against ECF
DVO / DVS	District Veterinary Officer / Department of Veterinary Services
DMMU	Disaster Management and Mitigation Unit, Office of the Vice-President
ZNPHI	Zambia National Public Health Institute



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IN AN EMERGENCY

Contact your nearest **District Veterinary Office** or the veterinary camp officer in your area. Report sudden deaths the same day.



Dairy cattle on bare ground in the dry season. Exotic breeds need supplementation to survive drought.

Disclaimer. This document gives general guidance. It does not replace examination and advice by a registered veterinarian. VAZ does not endorse specific brands.



Plan early. Protect the core herd. Prevent disease. Work with your vet.

Download this strategy, the farmer picture guide and updates at www.vaz.org.zm



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