

## Did You Miss Your Rotation Date?

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Understanding grazing systems and grass management is critical to the cattle operation. The other day, while driving out to check some of the Dickinson Research Extension Center's cattle, I visited an older grazing site. Grazing management was part of the center's original mission.

The archives, or at least a lot of file cabinets, are filled with data. The printed reports are numerous and the discussion plentiful. But sometimes a good visual reminder is helpful.

The center has two pieces of ground northwest of the headquarters that were involved in range studies several decades ago. Two scenarios were tried. In pasture one, improvement was attempted by the application of fertilizer, while pasture two simply was left alone. Time has passed and the original thoughts have been filed away. Standing out on those sites today would remind us of how incorrect recommendations impact native range.

Pasture two, which was the "control pasture," is still a native grassland site. Pasture one has been essentially converted to tame grass where only remnants of native grass remain. (The productivity of various grazing systems can be found on the center's Web site at [www.ag.ndsu.nodak.edu/dickinso/](http://www.ag.ndsu.nodak.edu/dickinso/), but sometimes a simple visual refresher helps spark the interest in managing rangelands.)

Cool-season grasses and summer warm-season grasses are distinctly different. Both are required to have effective grazing programs. Alternative grazing systems can be created, but the original native upper Great Plains prairies were, and still are, a cattle producer's dream.

Improper utilization of this resource costs the current producer and the producer(s) who follow. Effective grazing strategies utilize cattle because cattle do a pretty good job of keeping the grasslands healthy. That is the bottom line.

At the center, the grazing season starts in May, which is a great month for cattle in the upper Great Plains. The northern environment produces a large amount of cool-season grass and abundant cool-season forage for the mother cows and their new calves.

When managed correctly, cool-season pastures provide an excellent home for the cattle operation prior to turnout onto native range. At the Dickinson Research Extension Center, cows were turned out on crested wheat pasture on May 2 and remained there until May 30. The four weeks of grazing cool-season grass provided a jump-start for the summer grazing season.

As the summer grazing season is planned, effective rotation systems will help not only harvest a very heavy calf, but also keep the grasslands in peak condition for centuries to come. Dates are key, as well as proper stocking rates fitting the location.

This year the center started grazing native range on May 30, when those cow/calf pairs involved in a rotational grazing system were moved onto their first native range pasture. They were rotated to their second rotational pasture using the rotation grazing system on June 14.

The cows will be rotated again on June 29 to their third pasture, with the completion of the first round of rotations on July 14. Following the first round of short rotations through the three pastures, the three pastures will all be grazed again for approximately 30 days to complete the grazing season in mid-October.

Are you moving your cattle, managing your forage and planning for the future? Regardless of the answer, individual grazing systems should be developed in consultation with a specialist by contacting the center or other grassland management professionals.

If one still doubts the influence management can have on long-term grassland, stop by and we will arrange a tour. The real image is still worth a ton of words.

May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at [www.BeefTalk.com](http://www.BeefTalk.com). For more information, contact the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association, 1133 State Avenue, Dickinson, ND 58601 or go to [www.CHAPS2000.com](http://www.CHAPS2000.com) on the Internet. In correspondence about this column, refer to BT0304.

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**“Properly managed, rangelands  
can be maintained at high levels  
of production in perpetuity.”**

Llewellyn Manske, Ph.D.  
Dickinson Research Extension Center