



BeefTalk 666: Cows Need Grass and Grass Needs Cows

SUPPORTING MATERIALS



Range and cattle management is at the heart of every ranch and rancher.

What's up? A typical response to that question in the northern Plains ranching country would be: Busy moving cattle, we will talk later.

Cattle turnout to native grass is the first week of June, so the cattle need to be sorted and hauled. The hustling is a little more vigorous this time of year because the cows have calves at their side and keeping pairs together is critical. Also, there is no need to add additional stress by letting mixed-up pairs coming in unfamiliar surroundings.

This means that the mission of the day is to move the cattle as quickly, efficiently and safely as possible so that, at day's end, the cows and calves are paired and walking into the sunset.

However, all the sorting and hauling simply is the end product of good winter planning. Managers have reviewed last year's data, plotted projected and ever-changing weather patterns and revisited their grazing systems.

Grazing systems are a product of science that has studied how plants grow and responded to grazing. Believe me, the plants do respond!



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There is a simple way to show how plants respond. Take two flowering plants and leave one unpruned, but pinch or prune the other plant's growing stems. In two weeks, go back and look at the two plants to see which plant has the most flowers on it.

The unpruned plant probably will look long and scraggly with a few flowers on it. The pruned plant will look robust and full of new leaves and additional flowers. Good gardeners spend all summer snipping, pinching and pruning their selected plants to make them more vigorous, full and gorgeous. One could say that plants just don't do as well without snipping,

pinching and pruning.

The conclusion is that cows need grass and grass needs cows. This is an often overlooked concept that was instilled long before humans were involved in ranching and farming. Sometimes, it appears to the public that grazing cattle is somewhat haphazard and, perhaps, at a whim.

Modern ranches do nothing that is haphazard or at a whim. Grazing systems are well researched and literally take years to implement. Range and cattle management is at the heart of every ranch and rancher. At the Dickinson Research Extension Center during the winter, all the parcels of land are evaluated for stocking density and appropriate stocking rates.

For example, the center's cattle are grazed on a parcel of land that is made up of three pastures on Section 36 Township 143N Range 96W, Sections 1,2 and 3 Township 139 N Range 92W and Sections 35 and 36 Township 140N Range 92W. Pasture one is 628 acres and can handle an animal unit month of .51 per acre. Pasture two is 450 acres and can handle an AUM of .51 per acre, while pasture three is 567 acres that can handle an AUM of .56 per acre.

An AUM is intended to reflect the nutritional needs of a 1,000-pound cow for a month. These numbers are not arbitrary. They are derived from on the ground evaluations of soil type and other associated topographical features on each parcel of land.

The parcels listed will stock approximately a little more than a half of an animal unit (500 pounds) per month and acre. Put in another way, just more than two acres are required to support a 1,000-pound cow during the summer grazing season for one month.

In this example, if one calculates the numbers, pasture one will support 318 AUMs, pasture two will support 228 AUMs and pasture three will support 315 AUMs for a total of 862 (rounded up) AUMs. The total grazing time is 4.5 months or 192 animal units per month. At turn in, if the center decides to only graze at 85 percent capacity, only 163 animal units will be turned out to pasture. To meet that grazing pressure, the center will attempt to place 162,788 pounds of cattle to grass.

The last managerial piece is making sure the pasture rotation dates are set and followed. For this summer, the cattle were started on pasture three on May 29 and will move to pasture two on June 14 and pasture one on June 26.

After that, the cattle will move to pasture three on July 12, pasture two on Aug. 15 and pasture one on Sept. 9, and wrap up the native grazing season by moving to crested wheat on Oct. 18.

Again, ranchers are very astute managers and utilize the best scientific data they can get their hands on to manage the ranch. Progressive ranchers know that cattle need grass and grass needs cattle. By choosing the correct grazing system, the ranch and the world are better places.

Ranchers use appropriate grazing systems and the use of such systems certainly mitigates the changing dry or wet weather.

May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at <http://www.BeefTalk.com>. For more information, contact the NDBCIA Office, 1041 State Ave., Dickinson, ND 58601, or go to <http://www.CHAPS2000.com> on the Internet.

