

Fitting Grazing Strategies to Your Environment

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Grazing management can be as simple or as complicated as one desires. With a simple grazing management strategy, production is sacrificed along with potential income. With the high cost of pasture prices and rents, it is important to maximize the utilization of the rangeland we are managing without damaging the land.

Our first step in planning our yearly grazing program is to evaluate what our resources are by reviewing:

- average rainfall and how variable is it from year to year, is there a trend
 - cumulative rainfall to date, starting in October of previous year
 - depth of moisture in April with soil probe
 - history of stock days per acre per inch of rainfall
 - range condition to start the year
 - classes of cattle we are planning to graze
- NRCS recommended initial stocking rates for our range sites and range condition

The step-by-step procedure we use to plan the grazing program for the year are:

- Use a simple spreadsheet to determine how many AUM's are available to graze
 - determine what our percentage of cumulative rainfall is, compared to average
 - adjust stocking rate approximately to the cumulative rainfall percentage compared to average
 - determine the AUM's and acres needed for each class of animal
- Using a map of our ranch, determine where each class of animal will graze
 - determine the rest period desired (65 days)
 - calculate how many graze days needed with each class of animal to achieve the rest period
- Using a grazing chart, mark the days each class of animals will be grazing each pasture

The procedures we use to monitor the cattle and rangeland during the grazing season are spelled out in our written drought plan:

- monitor the rainfall by month compared to average
- monitor average temperatures for each month
- monitor monthly the "stock days per acre" chart
- monitor monthly drought index maps
- evaluate visually the rangeland and cattle condition July 1; key grasses are sand bluestem and prairie sandreed
- cattle and pastures are checked every day

Strategies we use to manage for drought are:

- destock based on July 1 evaluation
- utilize pasture insurance
- utilize custom grazing on 33-50% of rangeland
- utilize stockers on 15% of rangeland
- graze irrigated corn stalks during winter months
- don't feed hay

It is our responsibility as stewards of the land to monitor our rangeland and react to changing environmental conditions in order to maintain proper range health.