

EVALUATING GRAZING SYSTEM OPTIONS
Partnership between Harry & Jerry Merrihew
Cedar Hill Ranch & Lazy Bones Ranch
Harry Merrihew, Asby, NE

1. Harry has son, Rocky; ½ of ranch approx. 6250 acres. Jerry has part-time help and has about the same acres, making the total ranch about 12,500 acres.
2. There are about 1100 acres of meadow ground, with the balance of the acres being pasture.
3. The cow herd consists of a Hereford base with about 95 registered cows and 425 commercial cows.
4. About 20 pastures with 27 windmills and 6 submersible pumps.
5. All cows calve in the spring, then carried over as yearlings.
6. 100 head of replacement heifers are calved in March; cows calve in April and May.
7. Yearling steers are sold on video in August and delivered in the first week of October.
8. The yearling heifers are trimmed for size in the spring; approximately 50 that are too small to breed are sold, leaving about 200 that are bred. One-half of these we keep for replacement and the rest are sold.
9. From the registered herd we sell a few bulls and replace our bull battery with 8 to 10 new bulls for our own use.
10. Buy outside bulls for registered herd. Have tried artificial insemination with little success.

Cows to Swede pasture in December for 3 months
About 12,500 acres in total ranch
Curt and Dad got soil award in the 50's
Bob and I got soil award around 1976
Changed a lot of pastures in 75 and what changes
I am from the old school before computers.
Knew what would work for our ranch
Cow calf, yearling operations, well balanced
Cross-fenced several pastures
Put in a few new wells
Planted a lot of trees, maybe could use a few more for shelterbelts
About 1100 acres of meadow ground, high ground, low ground
What we use for salt troughs and why they are good
Mineral program, how we mix it with salt; we use iodine
How the ranch was put together
No pivots--about neighbors' pivots
Raise our own bulls--except for herd bulls, and where we get them
Service our own windmills and how
No sick calves
Vaccine program
When we calve and why
When we sell yearling steers and yearling heifers
Bred heifers--need a better program
Rope for sick calves occasionally
Contract hay for neighbors
Help neighbors with preconditioning and branding, moving cattle
Use low birth weight, black bulls on heifers
It all works great if it rains a little more than normal
Run about 490 to 530 head of cows at the top--depends on moisture

Rotation Scheme

I will start with the month of December as around the 10th of December the cows are moved to a pasture that is about one-half hill for grazing and the other one-half is meadow. The ground is usually frozen by then, so the cows can't hurt the ground by walking on it. The meadow has after-growth after the haying, which was done in June or July. With less than three-quarter section of ground, the cattle are able to stay there for 3 months, until the first of March when the frost is starting to disappear. They are moved to another location at this time. It depends on the grass in the next location as to which pasture we use. When we feed the cows from these winter and spring locations, we make it a point to try not to feed the processed bales in the same spot. We feel that this is why we don't have to treat for scours or hardly any sick calves.

The calves are weaned from their mothers around the first of November and weaned next to the cows behind a woven wire fence for 3 days. At this time cows are moved to a meadow 1 mile away to graze on after-growth.

The calves stay at this location for most of the winter where they will receive protein and hay until the following spring when they will be moved to pasture. The steers will be moved to about 1340 acres of pasture in May. The 2 pastures that we use for this are divided at about 2/5 to 3/5. The pastures will be altered going into one of the pastures for about 3 weeks and then moved to the other one... staying in this pasture until about August 1st and weighed out around October 1st.

The bred heifers are moved around to fresh pasture in the fall and then on to another meadow with after-growth. Hay and protein are provided. They are brought in close to the buildings for calving about March 8th. The heifers are sorted for size, with about 50 taken off and sold. The remaining 200 are summered on 2 pastures that are also rotated from year to year.

The late calving that we do lets us calve in the open. Our calving lot is about 160 acres. The cows are moved to one of two fresh pastures as soon as they calve: one about 680 acres and the other about 150 acres. They stay in these pastures until branding time, then the pastures rest until next year.

The purebloods are kept separate from the rest of the herd as they run on after-growth from the meadows and are also fed protein and hay. They also have pastures that we rotate from year to year.

Most of the summer pastures don't get grazed until the middle of June, and then we rotate to the other pastures around August 1st. These are rotated on a yearly basis so that the pastures that we summer will rest about a whole year before going back into them. Sometimes the cattle will go back into the pastures that we used the first part of the grazing season -- usually after the first fall frost, as we feel that pastures can't be damaged much after frost.

The 3 pastures that are used for the bulls are allowed to rest for about 3 to 4 months during the summer growing season.