

FITTING GRAZING STRATEGIES TO YOUR LOCAL ENVIRONMENT

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In addition to fitting my available natural resources, my grazing strategies also need to fit the changing availability of labor resources during the various seasons of the year as well as fitting in with the other enterprises in the operation. This all needs to fit in with family needs and lifestyle preferences.

The evolution of my grazing strategies (so far):

Past years

Set stock grazing -- cows eat the best and leave the rest

Five-paddock system and other simple fixed-time methods

Keep grass in the vegetative state; Mother Nature's goal is for the grass to produce a seedhead, and a good grazer's goal is to keep that from happening. Move the cows quickly when the grass is growing quickly; slow down the rotation as the grass growth slowly.

Three-leaf rule: as soon as there have been three new leaves grown since the last graze, the paddock can be grazed again

Currently

Pay more attention to the soil. Whether it is grazing land or farm land, the soil needs to stay covered.

Utilizing cover crops in the farm land to increase ground cover, biological diversity and to provide grazing.

Brown mature grass isn't necessarily ugly. Trampled-down mature grass isn't wasted like I once thought it was.

I am beginning to appreciate the benefits of extended rest periods. Many of the paddocks are grazed only once during the growing season. This year, several of the paddocks will not be grazed at all.

Own no haying equipment and don't intend to buy any. Feeding purchased hay (only when necessary) has been a good way to bring in nutrients and provide additional ground cover on farm land.

Other strategies:

Past years

Calved in February to avoid the mud.

Moved to a place on the sand; moved calving to late March.

Currently

Moved to town; moved calving to May.

Have begun using “across-the-fence” weaning.

Favorite quotes:

“Make sure the juice is worth the squeeze.”

“Any fool can learn from his mistakes, a wise man learns from other peoples’ mistakes.”

“The ability to retain knowledge is not as valuable as the ability to learn, then un-learn, then re-learn as conditions and times change.”

“I already know how to manage better than I do!”☺

Misc:

Knowledge vs wisdom and why I actually quit going to grazing seminars for a while.

Closing comments:

Many really good grazing strategies exist for many really good reasons. Find what works for YOUR environment on YOUR place with YOUR family and for YOUR reasons. And by the way, don’t forget to take some time to REALLY think about what those reasons are.