

HOW I USE MY PASTURES

Doug Gehner
Mr. Cowpie's Party Animals
Horse Producer
California, KY

Mr. Cowpie's Party Animal is a small agriculture-entertainment business owned by Doug and Joan Gehner of California, Kentucky. Our business is a mobile petting zoo that incorporates singing and storytelling into an entertaining yet very educational program for children and adults. Our "party" animals consist of horses, goats, chickens, rabbits and many other traditional and non-traditional farm animals. They are a major source of our family income.

Prior to 2005, hay and grain were being fed daily to the farm animals even during the summer months because our tall fescue pasture was of such poor quality. After a call to the Campbell County Cooperative Extension Service and a farm visit by the Agriculture Extension agent, a pasture renovation program was developed. The first and possibly the most important part of this program was to soil test the pasture. The soil test results indicated that the soil pH was very good at 7.1 but phosphorus and potash were low. During the spring of 2005 the pasture was fertilized and certified varieties of red /ladino clover and orchardgrass were frost seeded. Both boundary and temporary electric fencing

was constructed to allow for the implementation of a rotational grazing system. A six acre pasture field was divided into five paddocks.

The results of our work were amazing. We were fortunate to get an excellent stand of legumes established that not only improved our forage quality but also supplied the nitrogen needed for additional growth. Even during the drought of 2005 we had an abundance of high quality forages for our six horses and other farm animals. Due to the improved pastures we have purchased and fed very little hay and grain to the animals. We anticipate having adequate pasture for the animals until mid to late January of 2006. Not only has the pasture improvements reduced our feeding expenses but it has also reduced some erosion and overgrazing problems that we were experiencing. The animals have been extremely healthy and are actually becoming a little too fat on the improved pasture. The knowledge that we have gained from implementing the pasture renovation program will allow us to manage our pasture in a more productive and profitable way.

HOW I USE MY PASTURES

Russell C. Hackley

Beef Producer
Clarkson, KY

My pastures are utilized by a beef operation consisting primarily of a small cow/calf herd (30 cows), and a stocker operation numbering from 300-350 head annually, which are grazed only, from spring until fall. These stockers are purchased, continental breed calves, weighing from 500-550 pounds. In the fall, they are sold to Laura's Lean Beef, usually at a forward contracted price after adding 300 pounds of gain. Occasionally, the stocking includes calves not eligible for Laura's Lean which are then sold in truckload lots through internet sales.

While I have been involved in farming and raising beef cattle all my life, my methods and primary enterprise have certainly changed. About 13 years ago, I began to focus more on controlled grazing and better utilization of my forages. The shift resulted in producing fatter cows without the opportunity to market this extra gain. Such opportunity cost overcame my reluctance to switch from cows to a stocker operation.

This move has been good for me because I have always enjoyed producing quality forages. Through better utilization, I am not only producing more pounds of beef per acre, I am also able to sell every pound of gain I produce with stockers.

Certainly, my operation does not reflect an attempt to maximize production, nor am I interested in pursuing maximum production at my age. However, it does compare

reasonably well with other beef operations as well as grain production.

For example, my stocking rate for stockers is set to produce from 400 to 500 pounds of gain per acre, depending on quality of forages and rainfall. A pound of gain for the past 12 years has had a gross value from \$.55 per pound to my best of \$1.26 per pound on a set of calves which occurred with a roll-up in price last year.

What delights me about this method is that I am able to harvest these forages with "tools" (cattle) that are appreciating in value everyday (2 lbs/head/day gain) rather than depreciating everyday as with the heavy metal of tractors, hay balers, combines, etc.

It is also a pleasant bonus to see how the fertility of the soil is maintained through the recycling of nutrients by pasturing versus other methods of harvesting, thereby substantially reducing commercial fertilizer costs.

The cow herd I maintain is mostly an emotional decision. These cows are descendants of a cow herd my dad owned when he was farming and he has been gone 43 years. I also enjoy the husbanding of a cow/calf herd, and with today's prices, it's even more fun!

HOW WE USE OUR PASTURES ON SURREAL FARM

Gil Myers, Ph.D
Goats/Sheep Producer
Magnolia, KY

Our 102 acre farm is all permanent cool season grass pasture, except for 6 acres of woods and 2 acres around the house/barns. Paddocks vary in size from 2 to 20 acres. Fenceline waterers are used to place water in each pasture. Soils are tested routinely; organic matter soil levels have increased after 12 years of rotational grazing. Commercial fertilizer is used sparingly. We plan to use more composted manure for fertilizer in the future. Dung beetle populations are encouraged. We obtain hay from leased ground and buy the balance from neighbors. Larue and Hart counties are areas of hay surplus so hay is relatively inexpensive. As a result we maintain a relatively high stocking rate (50 beef cows, 50 + ewes and their offspring) on 96 acres of pasture. We have a tight calving season of about 45 days, wean our calves at about 7 months of age, background calves on the farm and then ship to a Kansas feedlot on retained ownership. This frees up pasture for cows and sheep.

Goats were initially purchased to clear brush. After two summers a few goats turned the 6 acre thicket into a park-like setting, allowing for more grass growth. The sheep (easy-care Bamoka hair sheep) graze the same pastures as the cow herd. Easy-care sheep consume some browse. Sheep and goats often share the same pasture with the cow/calf herd. Sheep and goats co-grazed for a few years but no longer do. Currently the meat goat flock is managed on a leased 10 acre facility with 8 paddocks. Weaned kids are returned to the home farm where they graze paddocks and weed lots close to buildings or are confined. Both sheep and goats have access to night-pens for predator prevention.

Parasite resistant sheep and goats are being intensively selected. Worm parasites are monitored using the FAMACHA anemia guide during the June – September worm season and worm egg counts periodically. Genetic selection and co-grazing with the beef herd resulted in no losses due to worm parasites among the Bamoka sheep during the dry year of 2005 and minimal loss in 2004, a wet year. This effective worm control program was achieved without use of routine flock deworming and very few individual dewormings.

After browse is consumed, goats graze fescue/orchardgrass. We have had good success growing perennial ryegrass. We observe fewer weeds as a result of sheep and goat pressure; this has allowed more grass to grow. With sheep, care must be taken to keep them rotating to avoid overgrazing. Sheep numbers were cut in 2005 nearly in half due to drought and our decision to provide the cows the best grazing. In 2005, we installed a heavy use hay feeding pad using geotextile fabric. This will reduce the amount of pasture damaged when feeding rolled hay to the cow herd. Both sheep and goats graze stockpiled fescue when available. Red and Ladino clovers are added using a no-till drill. We will continue multi-species grazing of hair-sheep and beef cattle as we see this as sustainable, manageable and beneficial.