

Column Name- The Heartland Minute

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“Rotational Grazing”

Most of us love the taste of vegetables fresh from the garden. Well, it turns out beef cattle sort of feel the same way. They prefer to dine on certain grasses in pastures. The lushest green growth that is fresh and taste great to them. They will tend to consume the most palatable parts of the pasture first. When we limit their grazing to small areas they will eat more of the less appealing forages available to them and thus maximizing our pasture’s potential.

Many of you know this system is often referred to as rotational grazing in which cattle are moved throughout the grazing season, allowing the grass to rest when the animals are not actively grazing. The longer and harder we graze pastures, the harder it can be for them to recover from the stress of that high grazing pressure.

Forage productivity is not going to be the same across the whole ranch and so producers can use temporary electric fence to vary the sizes of pastures, depending on the recovery time of the grasses. Much of this of course, depends on the environmental conditions we are having in the area. Which, surprise, has been drought conditions as of late. We have been receiving decent rainfalls in the area, but Greenwood County is still in the D2 – D4 drought stage depending on the area.

Utilizing intensive grazing is not necessarily about improving individual performance of an animal, but instead forces cattle to consume a higher percentage of the forage that is produced. Thus, your carrying capacity goes up or your number of hay feeding days goes down depending on how you manage the number of animals out on the pasture.

As with many management systems, there can be drawbacks. Rotational grazing is going to require more labor to put up the temporary fence, move the cattle and adjust the locations of the mineral supplement and water source. Also, temporary electric fences will not always hold the cattle in or other wildlife, like deer, out of the pasture because wires can break easily.

This system works best, and makes more sense, being utilized for interior fences. The perimeter fence should be a stronger, permanent fence so that if the temporary fence breaks the cattle aren’t off the property. This system would also work great for grazing crop residues.

Information comes from K-State University Beef Cattle Institute veterinarians, Dr. Brad White, Dr. Bob Larson, and Dr. Phillip Lancaster.

For more information regarding Agriculture and Natural Resources, 4-H Youth Development, or K-State Research and Extension call the office at 620-583-7455, email me, Ben Sims, at benjam63@ksu.edu, or stop by the office which is located inside the courthouse. Be sure to follow K-State Research and Extension- Greenwood County on Facebook for the most up-to-date information on Extension education programs and the Greenwood County 4-H program.