

Efficiency and Effectiveness of Managing Pastures

I developed a unique perspective and a growing passion for forage at a young age. I grew up on a farm raising and showing cattle; therefore my interests have always revolved around cattle. Every vacation was a cattle show, after-school activities were working with my show prospects, and now I am in school hoping to pursue a career in the animal agriculture industry. However, my passion for cattle quickly evolved from its focus on cattle production to an understanding of the pasture systems on which they survive. I now realize that managing land has to come first.

My interest in forage started when we began a demonstration project grazing our cattle on a variety called Ray's Crazy Mix. The demonstration plot utilized was an offseason tobacco field with sandy, unfertile soil, yet it presented a remarkable cover when broadcast with the mixture. Observations that were recorded throughout this project were the average daily gain of the cattle, soil productivity of the tobacco field, influence on the following seasons crop, and the economic impact. By keeping records on when we rotated and periodic weights, we calculated average daily gain and compared this between the cattle. In the trial, there were 6 head of cattle with similar genetics and environmental backgrounds. Average daily gains were compared before, during, and after the demonstration using three different variables including a diet of primarily grass, primarily feed, and a mixture of grass and feed.

Through this project, I learned how vital it is to manage pasture, for it is the fuel behind any livestock operation. Not only is it good practice for your land, but it is undeniably the most beneficial and economical source of nutrient for grazing animals when managed correctly. Originally, we did this project to measure the productivity of our cattle, however, we discovered that the most advantageous information to come out of it was learning how to manage our pastures. We have started an intensive grazing operation in which we utilize new technologies such as geared reels, temporary fencing, and solar panel fence chargers. This has provided us with some of the best results in terms of maintenance, growth, and docility. Temporary fencing practices have been so successful for us because we have rejuvenated our soil making for better pastures to benefit our herd's diet. Moving from pasture to pasture is no longer a difficult task. We have to have our cattle cross a fairly busy road to get to the other pasture, and because of the use of temporary fencing, they are more docile and used to human interaction as well as understanding and respecting poly wire. This makes for much easier movement and handling with cattle and better utilization of land.

A misconception about using techniques such as temporary fencing is the amount of time that it consumes. When we started this project, I was not familiar with temporary fencing nor had I worked on the land that we were using. I was in charge of the primarily grass variable, therefore, I came up with how we would manage it. I diligently logged how many hours I spent on this project and included it in my design to prove that time was not a limiting factor of this technique. I spent five hours total setting up the system that stretched over roughly five acres. I drove each

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Benefits of using pasture management techniques like temporary fencing are endless. Not only did we see an increase in the productivity of our cattle, but we also saw a tremendous impact on our land such as an increase in insects like dung beetles and earthworms creating countless tunnels in the ground improving aeration and waterways in the soil, an increase in yield in the crop that followed this demonstration, and most impactful to us, we saw vast economical and efficiency improvements. By utilizing these techniques, we have transformed our operation and created a much more manageable system with decreased costs, improved land conditions, and docile, high performing cattle. I would encourage every person that owns cattle to develop a management system that works for their operation.