Grazing Panel

Jeff Beasley-Beasley Farm

Jeff Beasley and his family run an integrated cattle and grain operation in Creal Springs, IL. The farm has been in the family since the early 1900’s, and is approximately 550 acres with 450 acres devoted to pasture. Beasley is a past president of the Illinois Cattleman’s Association.

Our farm is a diversified beef operation. We are running cow/calf (registered and commercial), seedstock sales, bull and heifer development, stockers (grazing only), backgrounding (pasture and feedlot) and finishing (feedlot only).

No overall changes have been made in diversity of operation. The changes we do see from time to time may have to do with our cattle inventory and which of those enterprises may be seeing the most numbers at a given time. We try to remain flexible based on market pricing and options, weather, cattle sourcing, etc.

I think over the last two years we have tried to give more focus to forage utilization. More cognizant of the fact we were not managing forage hardly at all, just managing cattle. One pasture has been set aside for rotational grazing management due to our involvement with the Pasture Project.

As compared with non-managed grazing in other pastures, we have over the last two years seen an increase in forage diversity and quantity in the managed grazing pasture. The first year we used yearling cattle through the rotation. The second year we used pregnant cows. For our purposes, we have found the cows were easier to manage in the rotation than the yearlings.

No work has been done as far as testing to see if there has been any improvement in the soil and forage quality in the managed pasture.

Trevor Toland- Toland’s River Oak Ranch

Trevor Toland runs a heifer development operation near Macomb, IL. The ranch consists of approximately 200 acres of permanent pasture, 65 acres of crop land and 100 acres of managed woodlands. Trevor has received numerous awards for his work to promote conservation and environmental stewardship at the farm. He is a past president of the Illinois Beef Association and has been rotational grazing for over 20 years. He opens his operation several times during each year to tour groups, as well as classes from Western Illinois University, to teach the advantages of management intensive rotational grazing.

Open yearling heifers come to the ranch around April 1st each year and are returned to their home ranch as bred heifers nine months later. During those nine months, the heifers graze fescue/red clover and reeds canary/alsike pastures with no supplementation. The fescue/red clover pastures are stockpiled after September 1st to be grazed in November and December.

As years pass, Toland has continued to develop and refine a management intensive rotational grazing system. After beginning the Adaptive High Stock Density Grazing study, Toland has continued to downsize paddocks to improve efficiency, control and change animal behavior. The ranch now has 37 permanently fenced paddocks, ranging in size from 2 to 10 acres each. Any number of these paddocks may also, on occasion, be subdivided by temporary fencing.

Toland’s River Oak Ranch is an example of a MIG operation that is successful and profitable despite having a predominance of floodplain and rough land not suitable for any other purposes.
Ted Krauskopf-Hickory Flat Cattle Company

Ted Krauskopf’s grazing operation consists of 90 acres of improved pasture including 20 acres of annuals for summer grazing. Krauskopf is a cooperator with Andras Stock Farm. The herd of 40 brood cows are mostly registered Red Angus, with the balance being commercial cows. Registered calves go to Andras after weaning, while commercial calves are sometimes sold after weaning or kept for grass finishing. In 2013, Krauskopf received the IBA Environmental Steward of the Year award.

Thanks to an EQIP Contract in 2007 the pasture was improved with new fencing, water in the paddocks, and a winter feeding station over 3 years. An additional 40 acres of perennial pasture was added as part of that contract. The additional acres allowed forage to be stockpiled for winter grazing by the 40-head cow herd. The herd was calving spring and fall at that time. The winter stockpile was strip grazed using portable fence with the cows getting enough forage for 1 to 2 days between moves. The strip-grazing offered several benefits. The cattle grazed more evenly, and with that, manure distribution was much more even, so nutrients were landing where they needed to be more often. The forage usage was much better since the cows didn’t spend as much time walking the whole pasture. We started strip grazing in spring but soon decided to continue year around and move fence almost every day. It’s about a 30-minute chore and is mostly done from the 4-wheeler.

In 2014, Hickory Flat Cattle Co. agreed to be a demonstration site for “The Pasture Project” in Illinois. Baseline sampling was completed in August of 2014. The sampling included soil fertility, soil biological life, soil water absorbing ability, compaction, and a forage species inventory. As a demonstration site, a High Stock Density Grazing trial was completed in 2015 on one 7-acre paddock, and again in 2016 on another 6-acre paddock. Stock density was about 300,000 pounds per acre for both trials. The forage in the paddocks was allowed to fully mature before the trial. To get the 300,000-pound stock density, it required the fence be moved five times per day during daylight for the cows to get the amount of forage they needed. During the night, they picked over the residue. The benefits of having the cattle graze in a dense manner include: more uniform grazing; better manure and urine distribution; creation of a residue mat on the soil surface that, with the increased hoof action, sets the stage for increased soil microbial activity since the soil stays cooler; as well as germination of forage seeds in the soil seed bank. Runoff from rain is also reduced.

Since 2014, the cow herd has been switched to 100 percent fall calving. I’m leaving more residue after grazing. By leaving more residue, the grass roots are not paired back, there is also more leaf area to catch the sunlight so regrowth is much quicker and production per acre has increased. I’ve also noticed the pasture will take more rain before runoff begins. To increased forage production use, I have begun to save some calves back for grass finishing.

I’m looking forward to seeing the data from a new round of soil tests coming up in 2017.