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Cristine Hall  
*CSIRO, Australia*

Trevor Hall  
*CSIRO, Australia*

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## Cattle producer perceptions of their grazing systems in the rangelands of northern Australia

Cristine A. Hall<sup>1</sup> and Trevor J. Hall<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems and <sup>2</sup>DPIF, PO Box 102, Toowoomba, Q 4350, Australia

E-mail: cristine.hall@csiro.au

**Key words** : grazing systems , rangelands , lifestyle , pasture management , perceptions

**Introduction** Beef cattle producers in the rangelands of northern Australia are intensifying their property development and associated management systems with the aim of improving their pasture resource and increasing profitability of their business . There are no proven best practices to achieve these goals so producers have adopted a range of grazing systems with varying levels of success and for different reasons . The cattle producer organisation , MLA , is co-funding a research project with the objective of investigating inputs and outcomes of grazing systems across the northern beef industry of Australia . MLA has also established the BeefPlan project (Banney 2007) of groups of producers across northern Australia with an interest in improving their business performance . At the annual meeting of these BeefPlan groups , producers provided information on their perceptions of the grazing system or systems they use .

**Materials and methods** At the annual 2005 BeefPlan meeting , 24 producers representing BeefPlan groups across northern Australia completed a written survey nominating what grazing system/s they use on their property , why they use that system , and the issues they perceived as advantages and disadvantages of their system/s . The producers' reasons for their choice of grazing system/s are summarized into 6 themes (Table 1) and the perceived advantages and disadvantages of each system are summarized into 6 operational themes . The systems and issues were categorised into recurring themes .

**Results and discussion** Three broad grazing systems were described by producers : set or continuous with spelling (5 producers) , rotational (15 producers) and cells (7 producers) . All set grazing included spelling/rest periods . Some producers described 2 or 3 systems (Table 1) . The number of issues within each theme is shown in brackets . The system advantages concentrated on opportunities for improved management of parts or all of their business , while the disadvantages of each system were all related to costs .

**Table 1** Beef producers' choice of grazing system and their perceived advantages and disadvantages .

Grazing System	Reason for Choice	Advantages	Disadvantages
Set with spelling	Lifestyle (6)	Cattle management (5)	Pasture cost (9)
	Livestock (2)	Economic (3)	Economic cost (2)
	Pastures (1)	Lifestyle (2)	
Rotational	Pastures (13)	Pasture management (31)	Infrastructure cost (10)
	Livestock (6)	Cattle management (17)	Labour cost (8)
	Economics (2)	Environment (4)	Pasture cost (6)
	Environment (1)	Economic (3)	Lifestyle cost (2)
Cell grazing	Pastures (8)	Pasture management (14)	Infrastructure cost (4)
	Livestock (3)	Cattle management (11)	Cattle cost (3)
	Economics (1)	Environment (8)	Labour cost (2)
	Environment (1)	Economic (6)	Lifestyle cost (2)
	Holistic (1)	Feed budgeting (4)	

Producers chose set grazing systems for lifestyle reasons , although a pasture cost was recognised . This system also had cattle management advantages and no labour cost disadvantages , which is a problem with more intensive systems . The rotational systems were used for pasture and livestock management benefits , while the cell systems were used to improve pastures . These two more intensive systems had infrastructure costs as the main disadvantage .

**Conclusions** This survey shows the importance of lifestyle considerations in understanding the management objectives of producers in the rangelands and in the promotion of alternative more intensive grazing systems that may have environmental , production and economic benefits over more traditional less intensive grazing management . Pasture management , followed by cattle management , are the major considerations of cattle producers using more intensive grazing systems in the north Australian rangelands .

### Reference

Banney , S . , 2007 . BeefPlan . <http://www.mla.com.au/TopicHierarchy/IndustryPrograms/NorthernBeef/BeefPlan/>