GRAZING OPTIONS IN ALFALFA UTILIZATION

Paul D. Deaton
Clark County Extension Agent for Agriculture

Objective

1. The pure alfalfa stand would not be damaged during the grazing period.

2. For steers - animal performance while on the alfalfa was more important than pounds of beef produced per acre.

3. For cow/calf - animal density high enough to remove green leaf area in maximum of 5 days.

4. Initiate the demonstration with a minimal out-of-pocket cost for fence, water system, etc.

5. Minimize the occurrence of bloat where possible.

Implementation

1. Seventy (70) 487 pound steers were turned to 30 acres of alfalfa. The alfalfa field was divided into 6 subplots with 7 days of grazing per subplot.

2. Two hundred (200) cows and bred heifers were allowed to mob graze 10 acres of alfalfa (70 acres total) at a time for a maximum of 5 days. Spring born calves accompanied 150 of the cows each time they were allowed to graze.

3. No alfalfa was grazed before May 1 or between September 15 and October 15. Cattle were allowed to mob graze the 70 acres after October 15 just like they had all summer.

4. Steers on the 30 acres of alfalfa were weighed when placed on the alfalfa May 1, 1986, again on July 3, 1986 and finally September 3, 1986. Calculation for early rate-of-gain was determined as well as overall.

Summary

The steers gained 1.86#/hd/day while on the alfalfa from May 1 to Sept. 3, 1986. Their early rate-of-gain average was 2.32#/hd/day. The final weight of the steers was 721#/hd with a total weight gain of 224#/head. Two of the steers were killed by lightening with one dying from bloat. Only one roll of electrical field wire was purchased with all other needed supplies being found on the farm.
The cow/calf operation saw each acre of 70 acres being grazed from May 1 to May 20 with no damage to second cutting of the alfalfa. Nearly 1/2 of the second cutting was grazed with the (first grazing) early grazed fields being cut for hay. All the third cutting was grazed and a fourth regrowth was taken by grazing after the October 15 date.

All cows/calves did well while the grazing days of the farm were extended by some 45 days when using the alfalfa.