

Grazing 101: Taking Care of the Land



by Angie Stump Denton, editor
adenton@hereford.org

As cattlemen not only are we caregivers to our livestock but also to our land. As summer grazing time approaches, producers need to consider their care of the land and how it will affect this grazing season and the seasons to come.

Grazing management is a powerful tool that strongly influences pasture and animal performance. Management choices can affect pasture yield, nutritive value and stand longevity. They can also affect weight gain or milk production of an individual animal as well as the amount of milk or meat produced per acre.

According to a University of Florida fact sheet, to implement an effective grazing management program there are a number of important issues to consider. These include a) what is required for plants and animals to be productive in a pasture-livestock system; b) what management choices have the greatest effect on success or failure of a grazing system; and c) how can the nutritional requirements of the animal be matched with the ability of the pasture to supply nutrients.

A question producers consider is whether to implement a continuous or rotational stocking program. Continuous stocking, also called continuous grazing, is the continuous, unrestricted access to a pasture by livestock throughout a year or grazing season. In this type of system the livestock decide how frequently and how close a particular plant or area of the pasture will be grazed. Continuous stocking allows the animals to be more selective in their choice of diet, but it does

not provide for a regular period of rest for the pasture.

According to University of Florida information if continuous stocking is used with a high-stocking rate, plants are defoliated frequently, depleting their leaf area, reserves and growing points. Some desirable pasture species can be eliminated over time using this type of grazing management. Advantages of continuous stocking include lower input costs and fewer management decisions.

Rotational stocking, also called rotational grazing, is the grazing of two or more subdivisions of the pasture, called paddocks, in sequence followed by a rest period for the recovery and regrowth of the paddock.

The major difference between continuous and rotational stocking is that the producer, not the livestock, is controlling the length of the rest period. It's fair to say that rotationally or continuously stocked pastures can be overstocked or understocked, managed well or mismanaged. So rotational stocking alone is no guarantee of good pasture management.

Advantages of rotational stocking may include improved pasture longevity, more timely utilization of forage, opportunities to conserve surplus forage and increased stocking rates (generally 15-30%).

The producer's job is to determine the best compromise between production per head and production per acre. Controlling the timing and intensity of grazing is the means of implementing this management decision.

Visit with your local Extension agent or state Extension specialist to develop the best grazing practices for your operation. **HW**

Angie

Don't miss online Hereford 101

Hereford breeders, don't miss out on your opportunity to be heard. If you have not logged on to one of the online Hereford 101 sessions you're missing out on an opportunity to learn more about American Hereford Association (AHA) programs and activities, and the chance to ask questions. The webcasts offer producers an opportunity to share their thoughts and ideas with AHA staff and the AHA Board.

In order to view the video, your computer needs to have a broadband connection to the Internet. Dial-up Internet will allow you to participate, but will only facilitate the audio portion of the webcast.

If you go to *LiveAuctions.tv*, you will see an item in the calendar (list of sales) for Hereford 101. Click on it and you will be prompted to enter a user name and password. If you haven't previously set up an account you can do so via the Web site. It only takes a minute or two; just click on the appropriate link. It is strongly suggested that you set up an account before the night of a webcast.

The next online Hereford 101 will be May 18 at 7 p.m. (CDT). The focus of the webcast will be the age of dam adjustments, parameters and correlations. Dan Moser, Kansas State University animal scientist, will be the guest speaker. Plan now to participate. **HW**