

USE OF ANNUAL FORAGES IN A GRAZING LIVESTOCK SYSTEM

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Plum Thicket Farms
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Plum Thicket Farms

- Our mission is to produce high quality cattle, forage, and grain with management practices that foster the best stewardship of our land, our livestock, our soil, and our human resources.

Human Resources

- I serve as General Manager.
- My husband and I manage the cattle.
- My son heads the farming operation and does most of the farming.
- My daughter in law is a large animal vet and is responsible for herd health.
- We hire two summer interns.

Available Resources

- 563 acres farm ground under pivot irrigation
- 1774 acres dry land farm ground
- 2230 acres deeded native pasture
- 1850 acres leased pasture
- 380 acres of corn stalks leased from neighbor

Cattle numbers in 2015

- 286 cow-calf pairs
- 99 yearling heifers
- Will background 143 steers until March 2016
- Will breed 139 yearling heifers in 2016
- Will develop 4 bull calves for use in 2016
- 17 bulls
- 499 stocker steers May 1 to July 27

Pasture is our most limiting factor

Yet, we maintain an 11th month grazing season.

HOW???

We graze annual forages!

- Calve on Rye in May
- Graze sorghum swathes in winter
- Utilize crop residue (mainly corn stalks)
- Graze cover crops following wheat, oats, or spring cocktails (if moisture is available)
- Mob graze dry-land cool and warm season forage cocktails

Spring Rye

- Plant rye following irrigated pinto bean harvest (90 #/acre)
- Include 60 # rye in forage cocktail following irrigated wheat harvest
- New cultivar (Elbon Rye) breaks dormancy earlier
 Available from Green Cover Seed
- Dryland rye following a spring crop

Grazing rye can be challenging

- It needs to be 8" tall before you start to graze
- It is very reliable but grows fast and gets rank quickly.
- There is a very short window for grazing if you are grazing it before corn. Pinto beans go in a little later, so staggering use of pivots is helpful.
- It provides excellent cover for young crops

Managing dryland rye for later use.

- You can extend the grazing interval of rye by swathing it just as it starts to head
- Swathe traps nutritional quality & palatability
- You can hit the time you need to graze by choice of mowing height. Will get good regrowth from a short cut as well as leaving a stubble height of 4 to 5". There is about a week's difference between the two as to when it is ready to graze.
- We got 0.97 AUM/acre with sub-optimal management
- You may be able to follow it with a warm season CT

Grazing sorghum swathes

- Choose a BMR variety. Semi dwarf cultivars have better leaf to stem ratios and are more drought tolerant. We don't know yet whether they will produce the same volume.
- For optimum quality/quantity, cut just as heads start emerging from the sheath.
- Cut above the growing point so that you get regrowth. It is a valuable add-on.
- Never turn on until at least 5 days after there has been a hard freeze to avoid danger of prussic acid.
- Always check for nitrates
- We do not cross fence or limit access to swathes
- Can count on 3 AUM/acre production
- Works well for backgrounding calves if supplemented with DDG
- Great for wintering cows

Cost of Sorghum Swathes

- Land \$25/acre
- Seed 20 #/A BMR Alta \$38/acre
- Chemical \$14.70
 - 24 oz round up, 8 oz. superb, 0.5# atrazine
- Fertilizer 50# N 4# S \$47.06
- Planting \$12.00/A
- Swathing \$12.00/A

Total cost/acre sorghum swathes	\$148.76
Yield	3AUM/acre
Will take 3.3 # DDG to achieve 2 # ADG	
Cost/# Sorghum swathes	\$0.06/#
Cost of DDG (\$155/ton)	\$.08/#
Ration cost/head-day	
	\$0.98
Rumensin, mineral, care	
	\$0.40
Total cost/head day	\$1.38
Cost of gain	\$0.69

Mob grazing forage cocktails

- **Not for the faint of heart!!**
- Must have a population that can flex because it is totally dependent on the weather
 - Yearling heifers offer the most flexibility
- If you take in stockers, make sure your contract specifies their removal in case of drought, hail, fire, (too much rain?!)

Why a forage cocktail?

- Multiple species crops are more drought tolerant, have mutually beneficial traits
- Legumes fix nitrogen
- Brassicas (turnips, collards, radishes, canola)
 - help make P more available
 - help feed soil bacteria & increase soil biomass
 - down side: increase cycling rate of residue
- Improve nutrient quality to grazing animal
- You have to watch seed costs

Water Management

- 1 ¼" black plastic pipe (300 ft rolls) \$0.75/ft
- Quick couplers every 300 ft \$13.00 each
- Float and Float Arm (per tank) \$60.00
- 150 gal. Rubber Tank \$150.00
– (We used two tanks per system)









Cool Season Cocktails

- Plant end of March through first week of April
 - 60 # oats
 - 60 # bin run peas (Screen pods)
 - 2 # buckwheat
 - 2 # forage collards

Fertilize 50 # N, P & K based on soil sample
collards really respond to nitrogen

Grazing management of cool season CT

- Do not turn in until oats are 12" tall
- Do not take off more than 4" on your first trip
Properly done, this will increase stooling
- Keep your paddocks small enough so you can control rate of removal and move through them quickly
- Stocking density is the hardest thing to figure out
- Take forage down to 4" on your second trip through
- Third graze is dependent on moisture and ambient temperature
- In case of heavy precipitation, temporarily remove from paddock.

Cool Season Grazing Records

pasture	acres	class	head #	AU	head #	AU	date			st rate	Cum. st rate	
							Date in	out	days			
SW School O&P	80	steers	290	0.57			8-Jun	17-Jun	9	49.59	0.62	
SW School O&P	80	pairs	200	1.49			2-Jul	16-Jul	14	139.07	1.74	
SW School O&P	80	pairs	133	1.49	9	1.5	17-Jul	19-Jul	3	21.17	0.26	
SW School O&P	60	heifers	101	0.8	3	1.5	1-Aug	14-Aug	13	36.96	0.62	3.24
Frohman 2 O&P	70	steers	210	0.57			8-Jun	17-Jun	9	35.91	0.51	
Frohman 2 O&P	70	steers	499	0.61			24-Jun	30-Jun	6	60.9	0.87	
Frohman 2 O&P	70	pairs	67	1.59	1	1.8	28-Jul	30-Jul	3	10.83	0.15	
Frohman 2 O&P	70	pairs	200	1.59	9	1.5	31-Jul	5-Aug	5	55.25	0.79	2.33
Mid. School O&P	40	pairs	201	1.29			17-Jun	20-Jun	3	25.93	0.65	
Middle School	40	pairs	133	1.49	9	1.5	21-Jul	31-Jul	10	70.56	1.76	2.41

Cost of a Cool Season CT

- Land Costs = \$25.00/acre
- Seed costs = \$27.20
- Chemical = \$12.77
- Fertilizer 25-50-0-10 \$60.89
- Total cost **\$125.86**

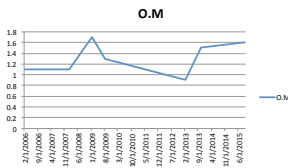
Return on investment

- SCA 2015 summer pasture avg. for NW NE (full care) \$76 per pair-month
- 1300 # cow with March calf = 1.6 AU so AUM is worth \$47.50
- Crop pays \$126.82 per acre at 2.67 AUM/acre
- No dry land crop is profitable this year
- It allows you to rest native pasture during the critical June-August window. It is especially valuable during drought recovery
- It is a good time to have lots of cattle
- Saves labor, machinery wear, and fuel
- Benefits you can't measure: You are building soil
 - Mulch rich in manure
 - Symbiotic relationships created by diverse plant community
 - Increased biomass leading to increased organic matter

Organic Matter Trends

SW School Section Sandy Loam Soil, Rotation 3/4 grazed crops 1/4 harvested small grains

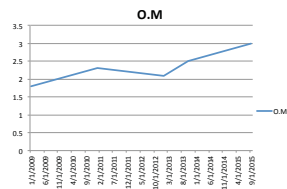
Year	O.M	K	P	Test	factor	lbs available N
2/15/2006	1.1	257	29	Melrich	0.9	26.1
9/29/2006	1.1	296	26	Melrich	0.9	23.4
1/15/2008	1.1	273	32	Melrich	0.9	28.8
1/7/2009	1.7	345	39	Melrich	0.9	35.1
8/24/2009	1.3	282	37	Melrich	0.9	33.3
2/12/2013	0.9	417	22	Olson Bray	2	44
10/1/2013	1.5	496	27.9	Olson Bray	2	55.8
9/10/2015	1.6	470	21.9	Olson Bray	2	43.8



Organic Matter Trends

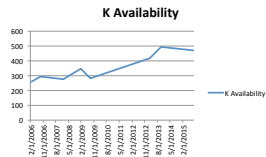
Bartel 3 North

Year	O.M	P	test	factor	lbs available
1/5/2009	1.8	31	m-P	0.9	27.9
1/28/2011	2.3	29	m-P	0.9	26.1
1/4/2013	2.1	22.1	O-P	2	44.2
10/1/2013	2.5	13.5	O-P	2	27
9/10/2015	3	12.4	O-P	2	24.8

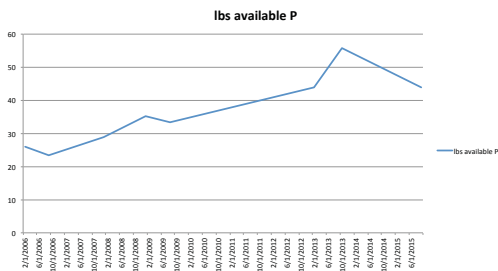


Pot Ash trends

K chart is included because K Availability has nearly doubled despite not having any K applied over the time period as part of the fertilizer program.



Phosphorus trends



Conclusions

- We believe our phosphorus levels are at a point that we will no longer include it in our fertilization program except where it can be put in row with a cash crop to aid early establishment.
- We still need to be adding nitrogen in spite of increased availability because microbiologic activity eats up a lot of N in residue break down. You have to feed the bugs.

Warm Season Cocktails

- Gabe Brown says that if you don't have at least one failure a year, you are not pushing the envelope hard enough. Why does it always have to be next to the county road for all the world to see?

Warm season Cocktail planted May 15th.

- 12# soybeans
- 10# grazing corn
- 1.5 # forage collards
- 2 # buckwheat
- 1 # sunflowers

Cost of Dry-land warm season

- Seed \$22.72
- Chemical \$15.19
- Fertilizer \$45.00
- Land \$25.00
- Planting \$12.00
- **Total per acre cost \$119.41**

Early Planted Cocktail

- May was so cold and wet, nothing came up until early June along with all of the summer weeds that we could not control.

Pasture	acres	Hd #	AU	Hd #	AU	date in	date out	days	AUM	Stk rate	total
Frohman 1 summer CT	65	197	1.59	9	1.5	5-Aug	6-Aug	2	21.78	0.34	
	65	197	1.59	8	1.5	13-Aug	20-Aug	8	86.728	1.33	1.67

Economic Return

- Cost of crop \$119.41
- Grazing value \$79.32
- Loss (\$40.09 per acre)
- The weed burden we created will increase cost of later crops
- **We won't try this one again. We are too far north for reliable growing weather in May.**

Later planted summer cocktails

- We planted a crop after we took the rye off the NE School Section. We turned calves on to it at weaning. It was fence line weaning after the calves had had nose blebs in for 7 days.
- They were used to the feed and just put their heads down and grazed. There was very little stress, no sickness, and they were on a diet rich in nutrients.
- Once they have finished this cocktail, they will go to an irrigated cool season cocktail planted after wheat. My guess is that we are achieving 1.5 to 2 # ADG
- This may not pencil if you just look at AUM/acre, but the management value and pounds added make up for it.

Summer Cocktail after irrigated forage silage is removed

- Planted barley and peas under irrigation for silage to be used in a back-grounding system
 - Yield very disappointing: 9.5 Ton/acre
 - I had expected 12 T/acre
 - should have used oats instead of barley
- Forage value acceptable
 - 10.9% TP; 59.2% TDN; 41.73% DM

Cost of Silage

• Seed	\$50.00
• Planting	\$12.00
• Chemical	\$13.52
• Fertilizer	\$60.89
• Water	\$34.89
• Swathing	\$12.00
• Chopping	\$93.12
• Land	\$50.00
• Total Cost	\$326.38

Cocktail following silage removal

- Avoid adding sorghum to a cover crop to be grazed in the fall so you don't have to worry about prussic acid poisoning which can occur if sorghum is grazed within 5 days of a frost
- Next year we will put more corn and fewer sunflowers into the irrigated cocktail The corn will increase pounds of palatable forage and we don't have to worry about drought tolerance

Cocktail planted first week in July

- 20 pounds of bin run soybeans
- 8 pounds of bin run corn
- 5 pounds of pearl millet
- 1 pound sunflowers
- 1 pound buckwheat
- 1 pound forage collards

Cost of cocktail

- | | |
|---------------------|-------------------|
| • Seed | \$25.00 |
| • Planting | \$12.00 |
| • Fertilizer | \$45.00 |
| • Land | \$50.00 |
| • Water | \$50.00 |
| • Total cost | \$182.00/a |

Will we do it again??

- Put 200 pair on for 16 days in September
 - Generated 1.88 AUM/acre
 - Cost = \$182; Grazing Value \$89.30
 - Loss of (\$93.00)
- Up side: set the calves up well for weaning.
- They were gaining weight rather than staying still
- I would change to oats and peas rather than barley
- We would mob graze rather than letting them have all of it.
