

Managing your grass is just as important as managing your cattle

Dan Beran describes how range managers can get more from their grazing lands

When it comes to producing high-quality beef, grass and forage, holistic management of grazing land plays a critical role. Now, more than ever, range managers are looking to not only maximize their forage resource but also steward their grazing lands. They are looking to control weeds, protect waterways, increase the quality of forage and preserve the grasses in the pastures. Dan Beran, director of technical services for crop protection for Nufarm North America, says proper range management affects not only the animals grazing, but the entire ecosystem surrounding the pasture or rangeland.

“When you look at millions of acres being managed for grazing in range management, having well-maintained rangeland benefits the environment, wildlife, cattle producers and the local communities,” Beran says. “What range managers are trying to do is have a healthy ecosystem that includes water, soil and plant communities.”

Range managers have several different factors to consider when making decisions

on how to manage their pastures. Whether they want to control pests or unwanted or undesirable vegetation, or even restore the native grasses, it's critical that managers are equipped with the right tools to achieve their grazing objectives.

GRASSMANSHIP™ DEFINED

Range and grazing managers have one common goal – to take the right steps to grow the grass for its peak performance for grazing. Beran says producers are willing to accept the challenge of balancing the right amount of grazing to make the operation profitable without degrading the pastures.

When it comes to steps that producers can take to improve their rangelands, Beran cites “being familiar with local range management experts.”

Beran says range management will differ in regions throughout the country for weed control. For example, prescribed burns for native rangeland are a common practice in Kansas and Oklahoma, while some operations will bring in goats to combat the invasive or unwanted weeds and vegetation because of hard to reach areas for herbicide application.

Dr. Morgan Treadwell is an assistant professor and extension range specialist with Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Service and says range managers should follow three steps to improve their rangeland.

“The first steps to improving rangeland are fairly basic: 1. Establish goals, 2. Inventory resources, and most importantly, 3. Monitor the implemented management plan.”



GETTING THE MOST PER ACRE

Along with providing high-quality grass for their cattle, range managers want to get the most value for their investment in management inputs. Beran says proper range management will increase the feed or the grass which will affect the carrying capacity per acre. He says if managers have fewer weeds and undesirable plants in their pastures, they are going to end up with more desirable plants leading to a higher yield in their rangeland.

“As you get more carrying capacity, you can adjust stocking rates accordingly therefore profitability should increase, all other things being equal,” Beran says. “This is a long-term approach but certainly can lead to a more sustainable and profitable operation.”

Beran advises that managers not overgraze pastures with a higher carrying capacity. Range condition can quickly go in reverse if grazing lands are overstocked, particularly during droughts. Range managers need to be mindful of their grazing rotation to avoid overgrazing.

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Dr. Treadwell says proper range management requires managers to have good land stewardship. She says managers can be good stewards by leaving enough plant material ungrazed for plant survival, soil protection and efficient rainfall capture.

“Pasture rotation at a proper stocking rate promotes more desirable plants, greater forage production and less bare ground, leading to increased carrying capacity and ranch profits in the long-term,” Treadwell says.

GRASS AS A CROP

Beran describes cattle as harvesters and grass as the yield, with cattle turning grass into pounds of beef. However, the grass and forage species are generally perennial plants, coming back year after year unlike conventional crops such as corn and soybeans.

“In most cases, pastures and rangeland consist of native grasses or domesticated perennial grasses,” Beran says. “You see the effects year over year, unlike a crop where you’re basically starting over every year. Managing your grass like a crop means thinking of it as a long-term crop that you’re having to continue year after year depending on how you managed it in the past.”

Beran says it’s easy to think of grass as a crop when controlling weeds. He says, “If managers let weeds seed and undesirable plants get established, then they are going to keep spreading and will eventually be harder to control, much like in a crop field. It is better to get ahead of the problem before it’s too late.”

“If you let them (the weeds) get established, before you know it, you’re controlling denser

populations of larger weeds,” Beran says. Preventing infestations of invasive weeds is so critical because many of them will outcompete some of the best pasture and range grasses.

Beran says when thinking about weed control, managers will need to keep in mind the long-term results. He says if managers don’t take control of the weeds early, many of them will come back year after year slowly lowering the carrying capacity over time.

“You really have to take a long-term view whereas with a row crop or annual crop you can implement much quicker changes on a yearly basis with tillage, planting and crop rotations.”

DEVELOP YOUR GRASSMANSHIP STRATEGY

Nufarm’s Grassmanship is here to equip range managers with the best tools possible to obtain their grazing goals. Managing pasture extends beyond the fence line, from maintaining quality grass and, controlling brush to recovering and restoring pasture and containing wanted vegetation around the property.

Nufarm has a vast product lineup to help range managers control their pastures, and they have served as a foundation for the program for years.

Weedar® 64 Weedar® 64 is a non-volatile, premium DMA-4 formulation that is sequestered to 1,500-ppm water hardness. This “workhorse” of 2,4-D amines is registered for cereal grains, corn, sorghum, rice, sugarcane, irrigation ditches, pastures/rangeland, non-cropland, tree injection and lakes-water hyacinth.

CONCLUSION

Beran says Nufarm has a portfolio that covers the needs of range managers regardless of the geography, be it pastures in the eastern or Southeast U.S. or the larger acreages in rangeland in the West.

Nufarm is working to encourage the overall stewardship of Grassmanship and aiding managers to better understand their toolbox to improve the quality of the grasslands.



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