

November 25, 2014

FIVE ESSENTIALS OF COW MANAGEMENT

The Nebraska Grazing Lands Coalition and University of Nebraska Extension co-sponsored a presentation by Burke Teichert, Washington State Ranch Manager and Ranch Consultant in Beatrice on November 19th. Here is a summary of the "Five Essentials of Ranch Management" presentation from my notes.

Changes Must be Both Integrative and Holistic: The operation must look at acres per cow and acres per person. The cow size and needs should fit the forage and feed resources available for the operation. High growth rate bulls are positive and negative. We like the extra pounds of calf, but possible increase in cow weight can mean more herd maintenance costs. The same thing is true for milking ability of the cows and for cross-breeding programs. Calving time needs to fit the resources of the operation.

Plan for Continuous Improvement: The use of time controlled grazing has the best chance of being the most efficient option for most pastures. Hard use followed by long rest periods. We might also be able to use bottoms more than once per year. Use of stalk residues, cover crops, and waterways and field borders can be very economical for fall and winter grazing.

Plans Should be Research Proven Good Planning and Decision Making: Burke said, "We would like all 17 year olds cows to have heifer calves." Certainly all cows with that kind of maintenance, longevity, and fertility are valuable animals. We need to carefully select and use new technology and breeding systems. The plan needs to be simplistic and again solidly holistic for the cows, land, and managers. Tom Brink, Brink Feedlot Consulting says, "You need to have a functional cow," said Brink. But growers should aspire for more. "To have a two-dimensional herd, you want functional cows that are adapted females with good reproduction rates, reasonable feed costs, longevity and that produce calves that have marketability for feeders," he explained. "You want those calves to perform above average in the feedyard, and you will enjoy better demand for your calves and better sales prices."

War on Costs: Teichert really focuses hard on reducing overhead costs. I have long argued that silage is wonderful, but far too expensive for beef cows. Teichert also adds hay, lots, manure, machinery and all other overhead costs into the mix. Grouping animals in as large a group as possible and better utilization of labor and pastures are his key points. The rainfall and crops we have in Southeast Nebraska offer us the possibilities of achieving some of the goals of keeping costs down while utilizing a variety of feed resources. Land prices here force us to look at these overhead costs and feed costs from an opportunity costs side which might utilize low cost lot systems in the plan.

Marketing Options: We should not focus all our attention on traditional marketing systems. We need to look at options of selling animals at any stage when the market is favorable.

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