Tanks vs. Ponds and Creeks for Livestock Water

In a few weeks, spring rains probably will refill many ponds and start creeks flowing again. Many will be used to provide water for cattle. But – is this the best way?

Many ponds and creeks dry up during dry weather. As they receive water again ask yourself “is this the best way to water my cattle during summer?” As you evaluate your water supply situation, consider identifying ways to put all water into tanks rather than allow cattle to wade into it.

Tank water can be healthier for cattle, and usually they prefer it to ponds or creeks. It may be cooler and offer easier access. Plus, when cows walk into ponds and creeks, they stir mud and sediments into the water and often deposit animal wastes. No wonder calves consistently choose tank water over ponds when they are given a choice!

Investing in tanks probably will actually pay for itself. Reports from Montana, Oregon, Canada, and elsewhere show that the higher water quality found in tanks provides a boost in cattle gains. Calves can weigh an extra 50 pounds at weaning when tank water is available instead of dirty ponds. Yearling steers can gain an extra three to four tenths of a pound per day. With this much added performance, pumping water out of ponds, creeks, or wells and into tanks can pay off in just a few years.

In addition, pumping water into tanks usually improves grazing distribution by attracting cattle to graze areas near the tanks instead of spending time standing in or around the ponds or creek. This can increase your pasture’s carrying capacity or grazing season.

Think of it — better grazing, higher gains, and reliable water. So much to gain and so little to lose.

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