

ANGUS

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Rotate to More Forage



Georgia producer beefs up production with grazing management.

Story & photos by
BECKY MILLS

Martin, Ga., cattle producer Max Freeman uses rotational grazing to boost his pasture, and beef production.

working his way into that predicament 12 years ago. "I kept reading about rotational grazing and how much more grazing I could get," he says. As a result, he divided his 80 acres of fescue, Bermuda grass and clover into eight permanent pastures and as many as 12 paddocks. The practice lived up to its billing. "Before, this farm could carry 35 or 40 cows. Now it can carry 60," Freeman says. "I could have more cows, but I'd rather have more grass than cows."

Dennis Hancock isn't surprised. "If you let your cattle graze continuously, you're only getting 30% to 40% of the good out of that pasture," says the University of Georgia extension forage specialist. "Go to a slow rotation,

(Continued on page 2)

Max Freeman has a dilemma most of us would love to have, especially during a long-term drought. "This year I have too much hay." The Martin, Ga., cattleman started

Rotate to More Forage *(from cover)*



Freeman (right) gives clover much of the credit for his herd's 92%-94% conception rates.



and increase the efficiency to 50% to 60%. Increase that to a moderate rotation, and you'll increase the efficiency to 60% to 70%. If you strip-graze, you can increase the grazing efficiency of your pastures to 70% to 80%.

Freeman currently has the herd divided into two groups of 27 and rotates both groups.

"It helps the grass, especially in the summer, to move the cows every three to five days. They don't tromp down the grass near as bad, and it gives it time to grow back," he says. "In the winter, I maybe don't move them quite as often."

He continues, "I can divide them any way I want with poly wire and step-in posts. The paddock size depends on how good the grass is."

The Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) helped him by cost-sharing on 35,000-40,000 feet of underground water line and concrete water troughs. He configures his paddocks so he can water three or four paddocks from one 300-gallon (gal.) trough. Trees provide shade in all the paddocks.

Favorite forages

His forages thrive under the rotation.

While fescue, a cool-season perennial, and Bermuda

grass, a warm-season perennial, are a productive team, Freeman brags the most on his clover.

"I'm proud of it," he says.

He gives clover, along with a quality mineral supplement, the credit for his 92%-94% conception rates. His breeding season lasts from Jan. 15 to March 30, when the Durana and Patriot ladino clovers, Redland red clover and crimson clover are starting to grow.

"You can get heifers to breed back," he states.

When it comes to clover's benefits, Clemson University extension forage specialist John Andrae agrees with Freeman. He says clover helps dilute the toxic endophyte normally found in Kentucky 31 (KY31) fescue. That, in turn, helps improve conception rates.

"It is especially effective with 2- and 3-year-old cows. Research has shown conception rates go from 45% to 50% in pure fescue stands to 70% when white clover is added to the stands," Andrae says, noting if white clover is added to stands of novel endophyte fescue, conception rates jumped again to 90%.

Once calves are on the ground and old enough to graze, Freeman also feels clover helps with calf gains.

(Continued on page 4)

Angus plus grass plus easy weaning equal more pounds at sale time

While rotational grazing is a good fit for Max Freeman's operation, he says the same about his use of Angus genetics. "They are a natural for this part of the country. They are good mamas." He has been using Angus bulls since 1992.

His Angus and SimAngus bulls, as well as the milk from his Angus-based cow herd, give his calves the growth potential to reach weaning weights of 550-600 pounds (lb.) at 5 to 6 months of age. The veteran cattleman also makes sure they don't lose any of those valuable pounds due to weaning stress.

"I put a creep feeder in the pastures about 30 days before I wean. Then the calves already know how to eat and don't stand around and bawl." He reduces weaning stress even more by fenceline weaning, then preconditions them for 30-45 days before he markets them.

He vaccinates the calves when he first puts the creep feeders in the pastures, then boosts the vaccinations at weaning.

"Very seldom do I treat a calf," he says. "They already know what feed and a water trough are before weaning.

"That's what I figured out over the years," the 75-year-old cattleman says.

The healthy, quality calves pay off for Freeman. This past summer he sold 77 steers and heifers at an average weight of 585 lb. for \$1.55 per lb.



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Rotate to More Forage *(from page 2)*

Again, Andrae agrees. “Clovers have very good forage quality, high digestibility and crude protein.”

Freeman gives the nitrogen-fixing legumes credit for savings on his nitrogen (N) bill.

Once again, Andrae agrees. “Crimson clover will fix from 75 to 125 pounds (lb.)

of N, while white clover will fix between 125 to 150 pounds of N per acre.”

Freeman says the white clover usually only lasts two or three years in his pastures, so he sows about one-third of his acres every year. He tries to seed in September or October but says, “A lot of times I have too much grass in the fall to seed it.”

In that case, he waits until late winter when the pastures are shorter. He uses a cyclone seeder to broadcast the clover seed, then runs an aerator and harrow over it.

“That throws a little bit of dirt over it, and I’ve had good luck with it,” he says. “It is worth every cent I spend sowing it.”

While the northeast Georgia producer gives clover star billing, he makes use of

every blade of fescue, too, especially for fall and winter grazing.

Winter stockpile

“I usually stockpile around a third of my pastures. The last of July or the first of August I’ll take the cattle off of it,” Freeman says. “I use a lot of chicken litter fertilizer in the spring, and I still get a lot of growth out of it in the fall if I have water. I turn the cows back on it usually the middle of October, but it depends on how much rain we get.”

The stockpiled fescue will normally keep his cows in forage until late December or early January, when he starts supplementing them with his homegrown hay.

When he isn’t blessed with an abundance of hay, he overseeds around a third of his pastures with winter annuals, normally rye, ryegrass and/or wheat.

“I overseed in September and October. Last year we had grazing in December but most of the time it is after the first of the year. It will hold out until early June, especially the ryegrass.”

While obviously it does take some moisture to grow forages, Freeman doesn’t use drought as an excuse to stop rotating his pastures.

“I rotate right on during the drought,” he says. “I manage depending on how the grass is growing. I try to let it stay up at least 4 inches (in.) when I move them off a paddock. It gives it a good chance to come back. I try not to move the cows back on it until it is at least 6 inches tall.”

He doesn’t use lack of help or age as an excuse, either. In addition to the 54 cows he currently grazes on his home farm, he manages another 50 head or so on another farm. He also has an abundance of hay to put up from rented hay fields.

The 75-year-old cattleman says, “I have a boy who helps me with the hay, but 95% of the work I do myself.”

Still, the work of rotational grazing is more than worth it, he says. “It is a paying proposition. The best thing I ever did was start rotating.”



Stockpiled fescue is a fall staple in Freeman’s operation.