

Living on the Land – Being a good steward

Being a good steward of the land is more than just an “environmental ideal.” It can also add to your bottom line.

Sustainable Pasture Management:

Agricultural management in Cherokee, Mayes and Delaware counties is very different from other parts of the state, but basic principles apply everywhere.

Nothing is more basic than soil. Cattlemen know that they are in the grass business, not the cow business. So test it. Periodic soil tests and forage analyses are tools to monitor a pasture’s status. If existing pastures are under full use, then buying inputs to improve the soil could be a wise, long term investment. Good grazing management can transform poor grazing land into healthy, productive pastures. More and better forage means more animal production, which should result in more profit per acre.

Animal rotation is another basic principle. Many managers use controlled grazing plans instead of continuous grazing to increase forage utilization and profits. Livestock is moved between pastures or paddocks at frequent intervals, giving animals access to a limited pasture area over a short period of time. With this system the livestock grazes all plants and no longer “cherry picks.” The animals return to the paddock after the plants have recovered. The roots maintain energy reserves, and the livestock always have high quality forage. Eventually, the plant community becomes more diverse and lush under this type of grazing system. Soil fertility is better because most nutrients cycle through the animals and remain in the paddocks. This is applicable with any size of operation. A simple system of temporary electric fencing may suffice at the outset.

Don’t be shy. Contact your local county extension agent. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is another good source of information on forage production practices appropriate for particular grazing systems. This agency has been give specific responsibility for helping farmers improve the grazing lands of the United States.