

Amazing Grazing

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Amazing Grazing is a pasture-based livestock educational initiative that began at CEFS' Field Research and Outreach Facility at Cherry Farm in Goldsboro and has developed into a statewide program.



SimAngus cattle at CEFS beef unit. Angus are being crossed with Simmental cattle in order to obtain the slick coat trait, which allows the cattle to be more tolerant to heat. Photo by Sarah Lyons

The program includes producer workshops, interagency advisor workshops, and research and demonstration projects.

The three major themes of the Amazing Grazing Program are:

- Improved Profitability
- Improved Animal Health and Well Being
- Improved Environmental Sustainability

Pasture-based production systems that achieve these three themes are good for farmers, good for their neighbors, and good for our non-farming population.

Improved Profitability



Johnny Rogers of Rogers Cattle Company moves his cattle into their next allotment of "Ray's Crazy Mix," demonstrating intensive grazing of alternative forages at an Amazing Grazing workshop. Photo by Sarah Lyons

There is no question that profit is a motivating factor for all of us. We all need to generate enough revenue to pay our production costs including labor, capital (equipment), fertilizer, feed, animal health costs, and then have a little left over to reward us for the mental energy we put into managing our system.

Haying is one of the most expensive activities we undertake on livestock farms, and when you figure the real cost of hay and then include storage cost and waste, and feeding cost and waste, the cost of the hay a cow, goat or horse swallows is extremely high. The work we have done with extending the grazing season for beef cattle for the last 3 years has shown that savings per cow is over \$1 per day for each day that you extend the grazing season. Furthermore, the improved manure distribution you achieve reduces your fertilizer needs, and improves yields in the following grazing season.

The nutritional quality of grazed forage in our demonstrations has been much better than the hay available on those farms, reducing the need for costly supplementation with energy and protein supplements.

Improved Animal Health and Well-Being

Animal well-being is becoming more and more important in the eyes of consumers. Livestock that spend the winter in concentrated feeding areas face nutritional challenges because of hay quality, while livestock out on well-managed pasture are able to obtain forage that meets their nutritional needs, keeping them in generally better body condition.



Waiting patiently for her next grass allotment, this Angus cow at CEFS has been trained to respect the portable electric fencing separating her from her next meal. Photo by Sarah Lyons

Good pasture management including rotational grazing improves temperament of the animals and they have a much lower stress level than livestock that are left to roam and mostly see the farmer in the cab of a truck or on a tractor. Again, on our beef cow demonstration farms, workshop participants have been amazed at how tame and calm cattle are. Inevitably, first time attendees at these workshops expect the herd to bolt and run when they see a mob of producers wearing plastic booties descending upon them, but instead usually the cattle patiently await the grass they know is coming and then peacefully graze while the crowd walks among them discussing body condition, forage quality and how beneficial it is to have gentle cows.

Moving livestock frequently also gives the farmer the opportunity to check them closely and observe health problems when they first present themselves. Common diseases such as eye infections, lameness, etc., are easily resolved if treated early, but can become big problems if they are allowed to develop over several weeks.

Improved Environmental Stewardship



Dr. Matt Poore watches as participants race to see who can reel in their line of electric fencing the fastest. Electric fencing demonstrations are a major component of the Amazing Grazing workshops. Photo by Sarah Lyons

Improving your grazing management does many things to improve the environment. Not only does it reduce the messy winter feeding areas, it also improves soil health which improves water infiltration, which in turn improves water quality. Improving recycling of nutrients from improved water distribution not only reduces your fertilizer needs, it also does a lot to reduce the

runoff of nutrients. Maintaining healthy soil will be more and more important on a worldwide basis. Increasing organic matter means sequestering more carbon which will have future environmental benefits. It also makes for improved earthworm populations, improved soil microbial populations, healthier and more deeply rooted plants, and as a result improved drought resilience.
