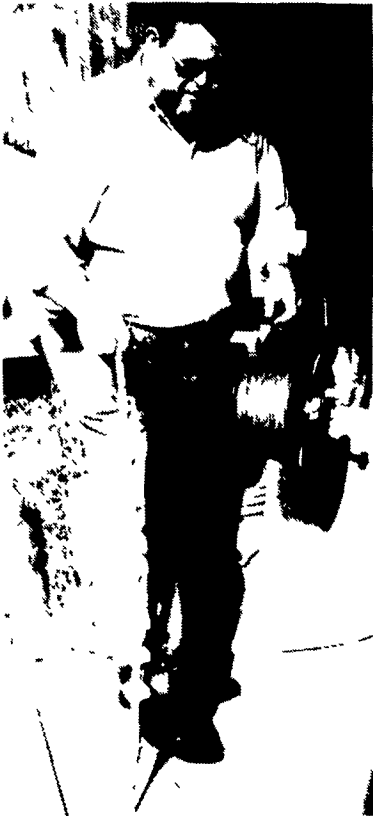


High-Density Rotational Grazing

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GLENMOORE (Chester Co.) — Given a "gentleman's farm," a lot of bottom-land, and acres of open pasture, what should a farmer do?

Well, raise beef.

That's what Dunwoody Zook did. He converted a portion of his 104-acre Angus cow and calf farm into a successful intensive rotational grazing system. As a result of his work, in January he earned a special innovation award from the Chester County Conservation District.



Zook holds up the stranded "polywire" manufactured in New Zealand. Fiberglass posts and the wire make up the rotational grazing system portable inner fencing.

It was a combination of choosing the right grasses and setting up special grazing management tools that earned him the award.

Rotational grazing

"Many farmers are not as open-minded about rotational grazing as they should be," Zook said.

Zook's techniques are similar to those used by cattle farmers in New Zealand. But in America, farming philosophy is different. "We've been brainwashed into thinking we have to 'mechanize' everything and we have to have a lot of big, expensive equipment, and that our pastureland is just an exercise area," Zook said. "And this is just the opposite."

After starting with beef in 1979, Zook avoided investing thousands of dollars of equipment to farm crops. "It wouldn't make sense for a farm this small," he said. So he turned to beef farming.

Zook's beef cattle operation brings him a "niche in the market which is not supposed to exist." His farm sells freezer beef to those willing to pay a "premium price for good quality beef," said Zook, without the "hormones or the additives or anything else."

Began in 1984

Zook began his intensive rotational grazing system in 1984. Out of the 104 acres of land, 32 acres are devoted to grazing. Of the 32, 26 acres contain cool-season grasses, including bluegrass, white clover (a nitrogen fixer), and perennial ryegrass. Six acres



About 27 head of Angus graze a two-acre paddock on the Zook farm. The paddock is covered with 18-inch switchgrass, a highly nutritional warm-season grass that, according to Zook, the cattle take to "like candy."

are reserved for warm-season grass, notably switchgrass.

Cool-season grasses are grazed when they reach 6 inches in length down to 1-inch length.

Each pasture is divided into paddocks — some in 1-, 2-, or 3-acre lots, depending on the number of head, the time of year, and how the grass is growing.

In 1984, Zook maintained nine beef cows and calves on 16 acres of pasture. In 1989, Zook raised 29 cows and calves on 26 acres of pasture, including seven replacement heifers and a bull.

Rotation in paddocks

Rotation in the paddocks occurs every 10 to 30 days, depending on height of grass and time of year. In the spring, cool season grasses are available for the cattle. In the summer, when the cool season grasses are nearly dormant, the cattle are moved to warm-season grasses, which are grazed at 18 inches down to 8 inches in length.

The switchgrass tested in at 7.5 percent crude protein with TDN in the high 40 percent range in 1985; in 1988, the grass tested for 13.2 percent raw protein and a TDN of 62 percent.

There were 45 grazing days for the warm-season grasses last year, before the cattle were moved back onto the exclusively cool-season grasses.

"We match the nutrient needs of the animal with the growth patterns of the grasses," said Zook. "And the cattle do all the work."

Open pasture

From April to December, Zook uses the open pasture to graze. During the winter months, hay, which Zook purchases at auction, is fed to the cattle.

"One of the things about the intensive grazing system is that

Butler Man Joins DHIA Board

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — George Cudoc has joined the 18-member Board of Directors of PA DHIA as the elected representative from the Northwest District. George is a strong advocate of PA DHIA and its programs. He has been a member for 12 years and is currently serving as president of the Butler County DHIA board.

George and his wife, Aileen, live with their three children on the 379-acre, 125-cow farm known as Marburger Dairy Inc., located in Evans City in the south-central part of Butler County.

George is a board member in the Butler County Holstein Club, and heavily involved in dairy promotion in that county.

George's interest and involvement on the state board stems from a belief that DHIA is essential to today's dairymen. "Sound business decisions need to be based on accurate records and information," he said.

"The members need a different kind of member representation. It matters what my constituents believe and I plan to represent what the members convey to me. I plan to represent them," he said.

