

Frustrated With Conventional Farming, Grazer Employs New Ideas

(Continued from Page 1)

of this on the farm, but we were used to the same system everybody else was; let the cows out to pasture, let them come back in, and feed them their food. I think it was out of desperation. We were short of feed and short of money," he said.

After attending the meeting, however, Simpson decided to look into pasturing more intensively.

"The cheapest way to feed a cow is to let her graze. Cows are born to graze, so we should allow them to do it. They have four legs and their mouths are built to go forage their own feed, not for us to haul feed to them," he said.

Simpson drove his point home when he noted that farmers who do not let their cows graze are essentially in a transfer-of-nutrients game.

"All they want to do is haul feed from the field to the cow and from the back end of the cow to the field," he said. "When you graze, the cows go to the field, eat, and deposit the whatever afterward. So there's no transfer of nutrients. The only nutrients they're moving is to the milking facility in the form of the product that we're selling."

Simpson further expanded his pasture research by weaving the concepts of holistic management into the process.

"Caleb Williams invited me to come hear a guy speak — his name was Allen Savory and he wrote a book on holistic management," he explained. "So I listened to him and he started answering all my questions about, 'why am I frustrated, why do I have to work so hard, this isn't working and that's not working,' everything just was haywire. I listened to him and everything made sense. When you look at life as a whole, everything is cyclical and everything revolves around nature."

At the time Simpson and his wife, Tammy, had one daughter, Hilary, now seven. Now they also have a 4-year-old son, Alec.

Simpson found that the principles he learned not only made sense, but they also were consistent with the way he wanted to bring up his children.

"(Savory) talked about setting some goals," so I listened to that and I came



Pasture is part of Simpson's simplified lifestyle. Here cows graze in one paddock while the white pens house the pasture chickens that follow along behind.

home and I told my wife and I grabbed Hilary and said our lives are going to change and they're going to change now!"

He was still not sure about the path he would take, however. He decided to venture off on his own and quit milking cows for three and a half years. To earn a living, he hit the road trimming hooves, assisting with cow sales, and working for other people at shows. He also spent some time working the night shift in a factory. His wife has always worked full time, so their lives became more hectic with Simpson not home a good deal of the time and the bills weren't being paid without the milk money.

"So then you start making decisions

surrounding what your real goals are, and my goal was to be home. To be here." One of the fundamental tools of holism is grazing, so he decided to put the cows to work rather than making a substantial investment in machinery.

"Your tools to harvest forage can either be a cow or a machine, so I got started in my enterprise pretty much with no equipment. The only reason I could start this enterprise is because Dad sold me the farm, cheap, according to land values."

Because the land values on the books were higher than the actual purchase price, Simpson had equity to start his business.

He built a step-up parlor and added

fencing to the farm so he could manage the grazers. In total, he invested \$28,000 in remodeling the barn, buying the pipeline and bulk tank, receiver units, gates, stalls and everything he needed. He hopes the investment will last many years with minimum repair.

"The bottom line is you turn solar energy that goes into the grass into the cow. It's the cheapest way to make milk and make money, so you can be home and stay with your family. That's one of the big things. I don't worry about production. I worry about making profits and it doesn't necessarily have to come from a cow.

"My goals, as far as profit is concerned, say, I want profit from the land first. In order to get profit from the land I need something to harvest. And what are your best margins?"

Not only did Simpson shift feeding techniques, he also became a seasonal producer and has added different breeds to his herd.

"Cows calve in the spring the same time the grass starts growing, the deer have their babies, the bees start working. Everything starts happening in the spring. Up here we definitely have to work with nature. I'm at 1,700 feet elevation and it makes a lot of difference in the growing degree days. Going seasonal, I try to plan it so the cows will have peak production when there's peak grass growth," Simpson said.

Last year Simpson had a 72 pound average at peak production. He fed a 5:1 milk-to-grain ratio on top of the grass.

To help manage the pasture, Simpson and his helper, Marty Fisher, use a pasture gauge to measure the grass in the various paddocks. When the cows are going to a certain paddock the grass has been measured to determine the amount of dry matter in that particular area. They also keep track of the bulk tank. If a paddock does not have enough dry matter for an entire day, Simpson will move them to another area.



Seven-year-old Hilary preps a cow in the step-up parlor. When the cows are milked, the headlock is released and the cow walks straight through. Simpson notes that the low dollar investment in the actual parlor helped him realize a profit in the operation sooner.