

Cow Country Reporter



March 2018

Volume 10 Issue 3

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Our CPL CEO, CPL Regional Directors as well as participating CPL members were busy in February and early March facilitating meetings that addressed issues about cover crops to crop farmers and ranchers. A meeting was held in the Lake Charles area addressing the issue of how mitigation banks affect the cattle industry as well as the whole ecosystems in the marsh area and timber areas. The meetings brought people from "both sides" of the issue to the table. I want to thank CPL member Mike Turpin for his informative presentation, "Louisiana Grazers Tell Their Story" to the Louisiana Agricultural Consultants Association attendees at their annual meeting. As a follow up to Mike's presentation, Regional Director Jerry Robinson organized a meeting at the research station in Winnsboro that brought together cattlemen and row crop farmers to discuss the use of cover crops. Gary Wicke, Regional Director organized a meeting at the Cameron Parish Extension Office where cattlemen and mitigation

bank managers listened to each other's "stories". David Daigle, CPL member from Ragley who grazes cattle in his pine tree forest gave his perspective about cattle grazing improving soil and forages. The results of these meetings? Bringing people together from different agriculture endeavors to address issues to protect our soil and water quality and sharing these stories with government regulators was a positive step in preserving our way of life.

So, what will March bring to us in the cattle business? Good demand for our calves going to wheat graze-out pastures. Continued improvement in cull cow prices. Plenty of forages if March winds and sunshine are abundant. Easter Sunday is April 1, so in mid-March retailers will be buying beef to meet the demand. Spring calving results should give us an idea of what we have to sell in Aug-Oct. On March 11 we "spring forward" with our time and March 20 the calendar says, "first day of Spring". Enjoy this month of sowing seeds and seeing new life.

Dave Foster, CEO

LESS DROUGHT AND MORE CATTLE PLACED ON FEED

By: Derrell S. Peel, Oklahoma State University Extension Livestock Marketing Specialist

A significant change in the weather pattern of recent months brought rain and ice across roughly half of Oklahoma in the past 7 to 10 days. In a diagonal line from just east of Altus in the southwest to Blackwell in the northcentral part of the state, locations received increasing amounts of moisture moving south and east from about one inch along the line to totals over 11 inches in McCurtain county in the southeast corner of the state. This should take a big bite out of drought conditions in the eastern third and south central part of Oklahoma while moderating drought conditions in central Oklahoma.

The driest areas of western Oklahoma mostly missed out, receiving less than one inch to only a few hundredths of an inch. The nine northwest and Panhandle counties in Oklahoma have now gone more than 140 days with less than one quarter inch of rain. These areas of western Oklahoma and the surrounding region face increasingly severe drought prospects as spring approaches; with a high fire danger in the meantime. It's uncertain whether recent rains represent merely an aberration or a change in the La Niña conditions that have prevailed all winter. La Niña conditions are expected to fade this spring and this could be an early start to that.

Time will tell.

Drought conditions in the Southern Plains likely contributed to larger than expected feedlot placements in the latest Cattle on Feed report. Total January placements were 104.4 percent of last year, with Texas up 11.1 percent year over year and Oklahoma up 30.6 percent from one year ago.

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LESS DROUGHT AND MORE CATTLE PLACED ON FEED

Feedlots placed 8.6 percent more cattle in the September to January period compared to one year ago. Total feedlot marketings in January were 106.1 percent of one year ago. The February 1 on-feed total was 107.9 percent of last year.

Limited winter grazing numbers and early movement of wheat pasture cattle to feedlots means that little of the normal March run of wheat pasture cattle will be seen this year in the Southern Plains. Likewise few cattle remain or are likely to be purchased for wheat grazeout. Early placement of feeders in the feedlots means that the short term supply of feeder cattle outside of feedlots is tighter, as reflected in the year over year decrease in the estimated January 1 feeder supply. However, many of the lightweight feeders placed late in 2017 will remain in feedlots until mid-2018. Feedlots are pretty full and will have reduced demand for feeders for some time yet this spring, thus the overall supply-demand balance may not have changed much. Larger feedlot placements in recent months represents a change in timing of feedlot production but not a change in the overall supply situation. In general, while feedlots will not maintain the placement rate of recent months going forward, feeder cattle numbers will be larger in 2018 supporting increased cattle slaughter and beef production.

FARM BUREAU CALLS FOR CLARITY ON EXEMPTIONS FOR AGRICULTURAL HAULERS

While again urging the Department of Transportation to grant agricultural haulers a waiver and limited exemption from the electronic logging device mandate, Farm Bureau in recent comments responded to the department's efforts to provide clarity to the 150-air mile agricultural commodity exemption and the hours of service regulations.

Until recently, very few Farm Bureau members or agricultural haulers were aware of their ability to use the newly interpreted 150-air mile agricultural commodity exemption, which provides exceptions from the HOS rules for the transportation of agricultural commodities within a 150-air mile radius from the source of the commodities. Enforcement officials, too, likely have very little knowledge about this exemption. This lack of awareness, combined with the unforgiving realities of ELD technology, makes the need for clarity all the more pressing, Farm Bureau emphasized.

In terms of what products are categorized as agriculture commodities, all nonprocessed food, feed, fiber, livestock and nursery and greenhouse crops qualify, according to Farm Bureau. Agricultural commodity "sources" are farms, ranches and other locations where agricultural commodities are loaded for transport, including livestock markets and grain elevators.

"Animals are unpredictable at livestock markets. Just like at a ranch, they can balk at the loading chute, be uncooperative, and need to be loaded carefully in accordance with appropriate animal husbandry techniques. All of this coupled with oftentimes long post-sale or load-out lines makes applying the flexibility afforded to a 'source' of livestock to livestock markets or agricultural commodity at a grain elevator a logical conclusion," Farm Bureau said.

Had congressional lawmakers wanted to exclude grain elevators or livestock markets from the definition of an agricultural commodity source, they could have easily done so, the group noted.

Farm Bureau is also urging the department to expand its interpretation of the 150-air mile exemption. Current informal Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration guidance limits a driver's use of the exemption to once per trip. However, the concept of such a "trip" is not defined in either the statute or the related regulation, so limiting the exemption only to the first "source" of any given "trip" is a narrower interpretation than the statute calls for.

"Such an interpretation also opens the use of the exemption to additional confusion in situations where some agricultural commodities or livestock are unloaded and others are picked up and calls for further subjective interpretation as to when a 'trip' is started and concluded," according to Farm Bureau.

In a similar vein, the organization challenged proposed guidance that indicates once the hours of service rules have begun to apply on a given trip, they continue to apply until the driver crosses back into the area within 150 air-miles of the original source of the commodities and is returning to that source.

According to Farm Bureau, the law clearly indicates that each farm, ranch, grain elevator, livestock market or other location where an agricultural commodity is loaded for shipment is a "source" of an agricultural commodity and, as such, each act of "transporting agricultural commodities from the source" is entitled to the 150-air mile radius exemption described in the applicable regulation.

In addition, time spent operating unladen vehicles traveling to or from the source of an agricultural commodity should be considered exempt time, as the proposed guidance states.

As Farm Bureau continues to encourage the administration to give agricultural haulers relief from the ELD mandate, the organization is also working with Capitol Hill lawmakers on a legislative solution to the ELD mandate and HOS challenges.

Source: Farm Bureau via The Stock Exchange News

GOOD GRAZIER? MOST RANCHERS AREN'T THERE YET

In spite of much research and knowledge about good grazing practices, we're still losing topsoil at an alarming rate. How do we stem the loss?

By: Burke Teichert

Most farmers and ranchers would not harm their land on purpose. Most will state that their intent is to leave the land better than they found it. Yet we are still losing soil at a rapid rate. Tons of soil flow down our rivers. There are still "dirt banks" as in Dust Bowl days following big wind storms just like the snow drifts following a winter blizzard. I don't mean to demean or belittle anyone's good efforts. But, except for a few, we are not yet good stewards. We are still degrading the resources under our feet.

A good friend, Gabe Brown, gets upset when people talk of sustainability and he asks a very important question, "Why would we want to sustain a degraded resource?" He strongly encourages us to become engaged

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GOOD GRAZIER? MOST RANCHERS AREN'T THERE YET

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in “regenerative” agriculture.

It's not that any of us are intentionally harming our ranches. Most of us simply don't know what good grazing is or what it looks like. It is not just reducing stocking rate. And improper implementation of rotational grazing can result in severe overgrazing and/or over-resting— both are often found in the same pasture.

To truly become good graziers and to start to regenerate soils, plant communities, biodiversity of all kinds, and animal health, to name a few. We must understand ecosystem processes and learn to recognize their healthy and unhealthy function. We need to recognize that the things we do with machines, chemicals, fire and our livestock cause a reaction in the soil and plants that will either be positive or negative. The reaction to all but our livestock will usually be negative in more ways than it is positive. And our past management of livestock, much of which continues to this day, has also had a negative effect on the soil.

Only a few of the many ranchers in the U.S. have begun to use some form of rotational grazing in place of season-long continuous grazing. And some who have started to rotate move from low country to high country and back in the same pattern each year. Others rotate from the calving pasture to the breeding pasture to the preconditioning pasture to the weaning pasture to the early winter pasture to the feeding pasture. They follow the same rotation on the same schedule every year.

Again, I don't mean to offend, but that is not good grazing. In spite of the number of good graziers being a small percentage of all ranchers, the actual number of good graziers is growing rapidly. Successes are common and information and learning is shared freely within this group.

So, where do we start? Most of us need some instruction to help us understand ecosystem processes—water cycle, mineral cycle, sunlight energy flow and succession—and to recognize good and poor function of these processes. We then must learn how time and timing of grazing events along with animal impact through varying stock densities can have positive or negative effects on the land, the soil and all the creatures that depend on them. “Time” is how long do we graze and how long do we rest a paddock. “Timing” is the time(s) of year or time(s) of the season when the paddock is grazed.

Last month, I presented a number of names by which good grazing can be known. I then pointed out that I had gravitated to the term multi-paddock, adaptive grazing. I have used the word adaptive for some time, but another friend, Allen Williams, linked it to multi-paddock.

Good graziers use multiple paddocks for a number of reasons:

There are two ways to overgraze. You can stay too long in a paddock and regaze fresh regrowth long before it is ready. Or you can move through all the paddocks too fast and return before plants have sufficiently recovered from a previous grazing; I often see this in areas with less than 20 inches of annual rainfall or where the stocking rate is higher than the ranch will support. With multiple paddocks, it is much easier to control length of the graze period and length of the recovery period.

More paddocks for each herd make it much easier to control stock densities and use animal impact for many desired results. A few of the desired results are trampling seed into the ground, trampling undesirable plants into the ground to feed soil microbial populations, increase uniformity and efficiency of grazing and to encourage a greater variety of plants and thus total biodiversity.

With an appropriate number of paddocks it is much easier to avoid using the same pasture in the same way each year or in each successive graze period.

We call it “adaptive” because good graziers are continually adapting to many different circumstances—typical weather, this year's weather, seasonal differences in plant growth rates, drought, snow, previous year's improvements, successional changes which are the changes that occur in the plant, insect, large and small animal community as a result of changes in your grazing practices, etc. We make changes; then the land, soil and plant community changes; and then we make more changes. The situation before us is always changing. Therefore, we continuously make changes to adapt to the new circumstances.

Grazing must be tailored to fit where you are; and yet it is not a prescription. Nature causes and seems to thrive on chaos. You want your grazing practices to not be predictable to the plants or insects. Variation in your practices will cause greater variety and health in the plant community which will be followed by increases in all types of biodiversity—soil microbes, insects, birds, small animals, wildlife and whatever man adds to the list.

I am afraid I have made this sound complicated. Even though we are managing complexity and diversity, the basic principles are easy to learn and understand. Acquiring good observation skills will enable you to become very good at applying the principles.

You want to have short graze periods followed by lengthy recover periods; but you don't want that to be a recipe either. I have seen, on the same ranch, graze periods of one day followed by recovery periods of 28-45 days in the irrigation and growing seasons, and graze periods of 10-30 days followed by recovery periods of more than one year—even up to two years—on expansive, unirrigated areas with low rainfall.

Our minds struggle with this, but don't get into a pattern. The recovery times won't always be the same even for the same season and circumstance. You may have a different class of cattle and a different set of objectives for the cattle or for the land.

This is a distinct mix of art and science. To effectively employ the art, you will need to develop very good observational skills. My friends, Steve and Judy Freeman from Missouri, usually spend some time each week observing what's happening to the farm. They look at the paddocks ahead of the cattle and the paddocks behind the cattle. They then make decisions on speed of movement, stock density, recovery times, etc. Most of this had been planned well in advanced, but now they are making in-course corrections to ensure that objectives are met.

EMISSIONS REPORTING RELIEF BILL A BREATH OF FRESH AIR FOR AG

(February 13, 2018) Today's introduction of S. 2421, the Fair Agriculture Reporting Method (FARM) Act is a welcome relief to farmers and ranchers who will soon need to file unnecessary, low-level continuous air emissions reports under federal Superfund and emergency response laws.

"Congress enacted Superfund and emergency response laws to provide the tools needed to quickly respond to hazardous waste emergencies. Emissions from animals raised on farms and ranches were never intended to be swept into these reporting requirements," AFBF President Zippy Duvall said. "We urge Congress to act swiftly to pass this legislation before the reporting requirement overwhelms our first responders and burdens farmers and ranchers with needless reporting obligations and the risk of activist lawsuits."

The bill, co-sponsored by Senators Fischer (R-NE) and Donnelly (D-IN), would clarify that routine emissions from farm animals and their manure are not reportable under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA). CERCLA requires facilities to report releases of hazardous substances that exceed certain threshold quantities within a 24-hour period. Both the Bush and Obama administrations supported a rule exempting most farms from the need to report ammonia and hydrogen sulfide emissions, but activist groups successfully blocked the rule last year at the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals. The bill is already receiving overwhelming support from both sides of the aisle, underscoring that this is not a partisan issue, but rather another example of activist groups looking to control America's farmland.

"Congress did not intend to regulate farms as toxic Superfund sites," Duvall said. "Farming and ranching are challenging enough without having to report, under threat of law, something that is a routine part of raising animals, but is nearly impossible to predict or measure. We are also concerned that these needless reports would effectively create a federal database of livestock farms for activist groups to target."

EPA has provided reporting guidance to farmers and ranchers, but there is no scientific consensus on how to measure air emissions on individual farms, requiring many farmers to spend resources on consultants. In the absence of legislation, these requirements not only require reporting by larger farms, but many medium-sized farms and even pastured cow-calf farms as well as ranchers grazing on federal lands and horse farms. Farmers and ranchers need Congress to act swiftly to protect their privacy and their businesses from the financial strain and burden of these unnecessary reporting requirements on ordinary activities on their land.

Source: Farm Bureau News Release

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