

We Salute

National Beef Month

Custom grazer divides pastures to save his grass

By Vera Sloan

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Custom grazer A.B. Fisher of McDonald can attest to the success he's had applying scientific methods to the land he's used for grazing the past 48 years.

"When livestock is allowed to graze the same area for more than seven days," Fisher said, "they will eat the desirable plants, and that allows for the undesirable ones to come back in their place."

To avoid damage, he says, a rancher need to rotate cattle around his pastures.

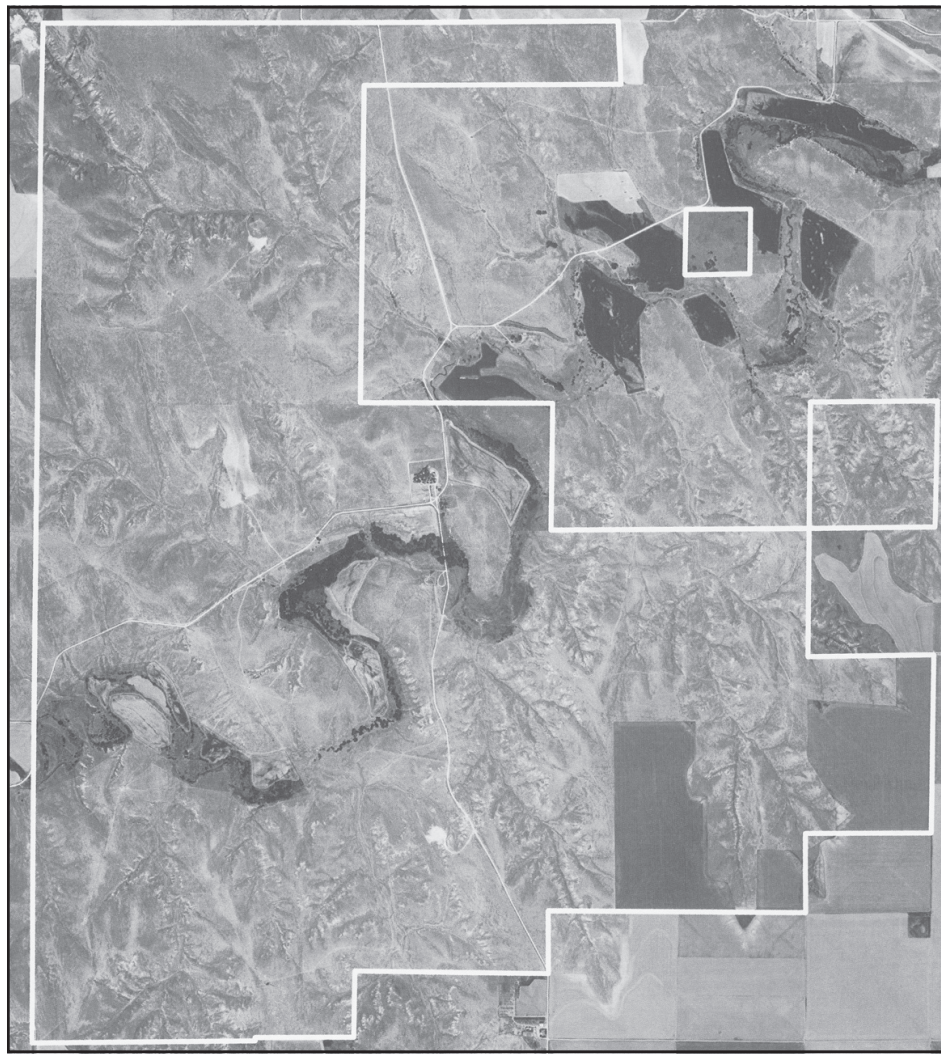
"The ideal way would be to do 'flash grazing,' where animals don't take more than one bite out of a plant," he said. "With flash grazing, the plant will come back in less than a month."

Fisher said he uses a technique called cell grazing, which he heard about and learned more about at a conference on rotational grazing. This method was perfected by Allen Savory, a widely known advocate of grassland conservation.

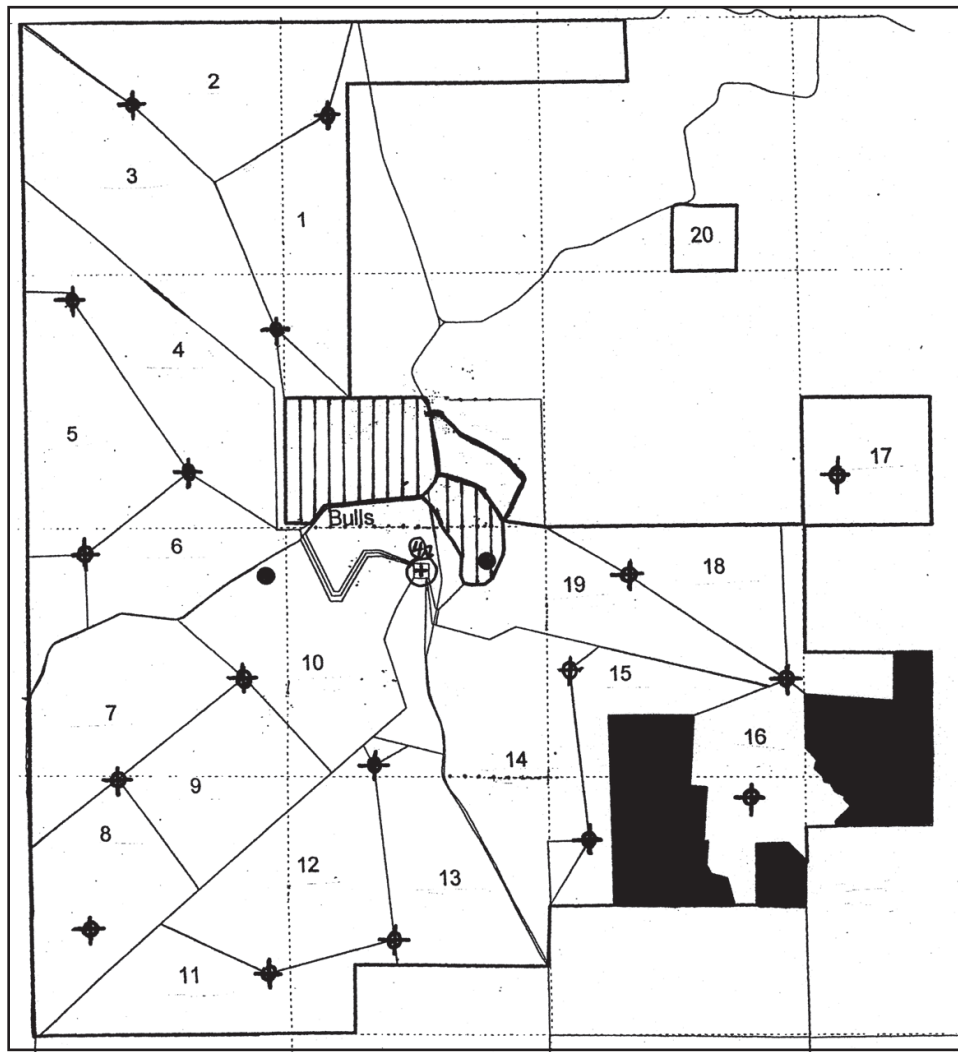
He said after he had studied his land, he found he could divide eight pastures into several cells each using the Savory Plan. With the rotation system, he said, he can run half again as many cattle on the land and get the same amount of weight gain on his calves.

Fisher and his wife Judy, natives of Rawlins County, have three ranches they have divided into cell system grazing. Their farming operation includes wheat, corn and alfalfa.

They began dividing the pastures on one of the ranches in 1988, he said. It has 20 grazing



An aerial photo shows large pastures divided into cells to conserve native grass in the cellular grazing system. It's the best way to ensure that undesirable plants don't get a foothold in pasture land, says Raw-



lins County cattleman A.B. Fisher, adding that the easiest way to destroy good pasture is to turn cattle into the grass in the spring and take them off in the fall. He says seven days in one pasture before mov-

ing to the next is ideal for the grass. The black circles on the chart mark water tanks supplied with underground pipe to eliminating the need for windmills.

cells, all separated by fences, with a center area cowboys use as a gathering point for doctoring and loading cattle. Water tanks, some shared by two or more cells, are supplied by 15 1/2 miles of under-

ground pipe. Fisher said he begins the grazing season by dividing 1,300 to 1,400 head into three cells to begin with, and as the cowboys watch the grass, they move the cattle to new

cells every seven days. Sometimes they can go an additional two days, he added, depending on the size of the cell and the number of animals.

Fisher said that years ago, when cowboys would drive cattle to the Flint Hills, the cattle arrived looking like they were only hide, hair and a tail, but after feeding on the grass while they were waiting to be shipped out of Abilene, they got what is called "grass fat."

"They had a name for it and called it 'ice cream grass,'" he said.

With the old ways of grazing, cattle focused on some of the native grasses so much, they all but disappeared from pastures here.

"Now we're beginning to see 'ice cream' grass reappear in this area because of the grazing rotation system. We're seeing bluestem and indian grass beginning to appear in some places

where we thought it was gone.

"We used to turn the cattle out in the spring and gather them up in the fall, but since we don't do that anymore, we're beginning to see that what we thought was gone is beginning to come back. We'll never be a Flint Hills, but the good grasses are reappearing because the pastures aren't grazed down."

Another advantage of the cell system, Fisher said, is that the cowboys' work is easier. Instead of having to ride all over a section (square mile) or two of pasture to hunt down the cattle, the critters are right there in whatever cell they're using. He said it takes a lot of fence, but he has a crew just to maintain fences.

Fisher said he prefers to do custom grazing for other livestock owners, who bring their 500-pound calves to put on summer pasture. In 180 days, he said, they have gained to around 750 pounds, and they're ready to come off the grass and be finished on grain.

He says he's hooked on the rotational grazing program, but does take a little time to figure everything out and put it all into place.

"It all comes down to making good decisions and real close monitoring," he said. "Feed costs go down, animal health improves and it makes the cowboy's job a whole lot easier when animals can harvest their own feed in a managed grazing system."

Workshop to cover grass profit

The Yuma County Conservation District invites everyone who has grass for grazing, or cows that like to eat grass, or both, to attend a free two-part Managing Grass Profitably workshop.

Yeah, right! Profit and grass don't belong in the same sentence! Or, do they?

The workshop will be Thursday and Friday, June 24 and 25. You don't have to be present both days, but attending both will increase your understanding of the concepts. Registrations are needed for lunch by 4 p.m. Friday, June 18.

• Laying the Foundation, Part I, will start with registration at 12:30 p.m. at the City Hall (roundhouse) building at U.S. 34 and Blake Street in Wray. The program will run from 1 to 5 p.m.

• Putting the Principles to Work, Part II, will be in

the field. Registration, coffee and rolls will begin at 8 a.m. We will meet at Chris and Shannon Stults' place northwest of Wray. The workshop will run from 8:30 a.m. to 2 p.m., including lunch.

Topics will include how a person can tell if the grass is growing, how fast it's growing and when to move the cattle.

To save a seat for one or both days or for information, call the Yuma County Conservation District in Wray by Friday, June 18, at (970) 332-3173 extension 3, between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. (Central Time). You may fax your reservations to (970) 332-4425 or e-mail Julie.Elliott@co.usda.gov.

A lunch fee of \$15 will be charged on Friday if the morning session is not attended. Late registrations and walk-ins are welcome.

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