



Woods Fork Cattle Company:

**Our experience with various grazing
philosophies**

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Experience with grazing philosophies 1987-present

Short grazing history

- "Controlled Grazing"
- "MiG"
- "Flex Grazing"
- "UHDG" - ultra-high density grazing
- How we apply those philosophies today



First "Controlled" Grazing System 1987

The New Zealand Era--"**Double your stocking rate!**"

The first photos of "controlled grazing" in the US appeared in the Stockman Grass Farmer in mid 1980s. Before that all the photos had come from NZ.

The plan behind this system:

- Small hard wired paddocks
- Water--wagon wheels and lanes
- Keep it short and vegetative
- Hay and clip to keep it vegetative



Our Experience with Controlled Grazing

- watering always an issue in summer
- irregular and small permanent paddocks
- not great manure and urine dispersion
- cattle not real happy
- so many gates!
- drought
- lots of haying and clipping to keep vegetative
- Farm *looked* great!

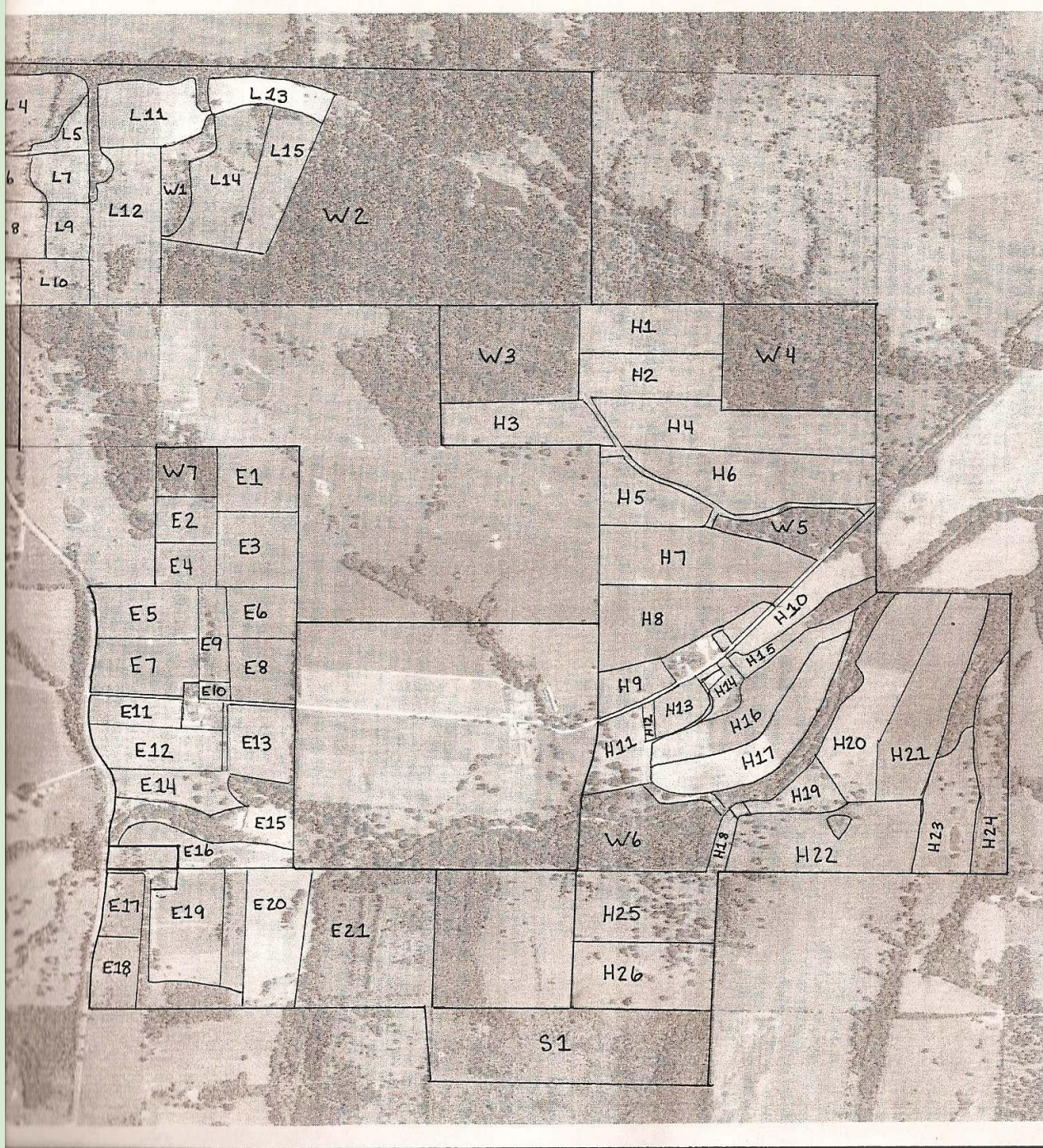


Farm looked great!

Move to the MiG system--mid 90s

- Made water more accessible
- Long rectangle or square paddocks
- Take half/leave half--moved towards taller grazing
- Began shortening paddock shifts--2-3 days
- Better use of portable fencing

Long rectangles+squares



Hudson:

H1	15
H2	15
H3	15.4
H4	24
H5	11.2
H6	23.6
H7	23
H8	21
H9	5
H10	7.7
H11	9
H12	1.5
H13	5.5
H14	2
H15	3
H16	19.2
H17	16.9
H18	2.5
H19	6
H20	24
H21	20
H22	27.5
H23	14.3
H24	13.5

Lowrey:

L1	12
L2	6.8
L3	7.1
L4	10
L5	5.5
L6	6
L7	6.2
L8	6.7
L9	5
L10	5.8
L11	11.9
L12	16.5
L13	5.2
L14	17.7
L15	12.1

Evalea:

E1	10.5
E2	4.5
E3	13
E4	5
E5	11
E6	7
E7	12
E8	9
E9	5
E10	1
E11	7
E12	13
E13	10
E14	12
E15	4
E16	12
E17	8
E18	9
E19	18
E20	20
E21	34

Shropshire:

S1	40
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Woods:

W1	6
W2	148
W3	26
W4	31
W5	10
W6	29
W7	6

First experience with MiG

Positive

- Did better during the spring flush of grass growth.
- Portable fencing-consistent moves
- Cattle happier
- ***Began strip-grazing stockpiled Fescue in winter***

Challenges

- Still lots of clipping and hay making
- Did not perform well during droughts.
- Better, but still not having the effect on soil and grass we expected.



Better use of portable fence gave us more flexibility and control



Winter Grazing

Stockpiled fescue: not the best *looking* grass



But the cows



... and the manure say otherwise

Cowboy math explaining density

1. Density per acre per day

- Example: 100 cows at 1000 pounds on one acre for one day. This equals 100,000 pounds per acre density.
- Example: Again 100 cows at 1000 pounds on 2 acres per one day. This equals 50,000 pounds per acre density.
- Example: 100 cows at 1000 pounds on 4 acres/day. This equals 25,000 pound density per acre.

2. Density per move

- Example: Take 100 cows that weigh 1000 pounds. Assume one acre per one day and two moves during the day [1/2 acre per move]. Your density per move is 200,000 per acre.

Density vs. stocking rate

- Density is the word we use to describe how many head are in a given area for a one day grazing period and is measured in "pounds". If we do more than once a day paddock shifts then it's per move-not day.
- Stocking rate, is average of how many head per year on farm and is measured in number of animals (AU). We use this number to estimate the carrying capacity for the year.



40-60,000 lb per acre density



100-120,000# an acre



Ultra High Density Grazing 200,000#+

Flex Grazing--Hay Equipment sold!

- **Seed Heads busting out all over... OH NO!!**

- **Made management adjustments**

- Late spring calving
- Flash graze
- More cattle--open cows and calves
- Increased grazing densities
- Planted Native Warm Season Grasses
- Taller grazing



Moved calving season to April-June



Take advantage of compensatory gain
800# steers ready for market on nothing
but home raised grass

Fall Calving Herd--complete dispersal





**Planted Native Warm Season (NWS)
grasses**

**Graze taller-
leaving more
residue and
increasing days
between grazings.**





Increased density 1 day moves (40-80,000 lbs)



Fall Grazing

Increase density, after bulls are out

Experience with Flex Grazing

Positive

- Grass, soil, and cattle have all benefited.
- Taller grass-helps to keep the soil cooler.
- More relaxed [cows and managers]
- Flexibility
- Cattle performed much better than anticipated grazing tall "crap" [dairyman definition] than I had been led to believe.

Challenges

- Not a plan that comes in a box.
- Farm became a lot "shaggier"
- Had to learn to change what you think is pretty!



**from a "golf
course" farm...**



...to grazing weeds?

Ultra-High Density Grazing [UHDG]

Began experimenting with this in the fall of 2007 after two years of hard drought and then summer rains.

- 260,000#-280,000# highest we have used
- Had 150,000# densities in the past while grazing stockpiled fescue.
- Have only used it in the fall after breeding season
- Increase in biological life and surface litter
- Not used in spring or summer



ready to move



moving...



almost all in...



all in...280,000# per move



Ultra High Density Grazing 200,000#+



left behind

Experience with UHDG

positive

- Cows less selective
- Levels the field for new growth
- Allows a way to control grass w/o mowing/haying
- Recreational mowing reduced.
- Adds litter to the soil
- More biological activity?

challenges

- Forage quality can be an issue
- May be stressful
- Moving fence frequently
- Heavy rains
- **To work we plan on 30% utilization of forage**

Production Goals influence Grazing Philosophy

Cows must:

1. Conceive and raise an acceptable calf every year. (Short summer breeding season)
2. She must do this on grass with no supplements except hay if needed.
3. She can't cause problems (health, behavioral, etc.)



To develop a herd that can do this, we sell any cow that doesn't follow the rules.



Grass by the pound.

800# steers ready for market
on home raised grass



Heifers calve at 22-24 months
Yearling bred heifers on stockpiled fescue



Two-year old heifer w/calf and bred back

From all the grazing philosophies, what we've learned

- 1. Pay attention to our own farm, and align grazing philosophy with our production goals.**
 - On our farm we want grasses and livestock that can thrive in our region and under our management with little to no additional inputs. Don't ask for too many things--but make sure you keep only those cows and grasses that can accomplish the goals.
- 2. Be flexible in thinking & management. Adapt to the "here and now".**
 - Reality is--each year and season is different. Rain at just the right time or a drought. Rain spread beautifully over a growing season or far too much rain at the wrong time. We try to roll with nature and not fight the tide. We do this by being flexible in our management.
- 3. Adequate rest periods might be just as or more important as densities.**
 - We've found that the best way for us to boost pasture performance is having longer rest periods. Though taller pastures may not test as high as shorter pastures, the taller grasses handle dry weather better, cows perform well and are "happier".

Judy's simplified rules of grazing

GRAZING NOTES

1. When in doubt, move them. It is much better to leave grass- as "grass makes grass"- than it is to overgraze.
2. Move them when they are still full and not anxious. They will have better gains, stay calmer and have better breed-back.
3. I like one day moves. If I measure wrong and give them too much for one day, I prefer to leave them for a few extra hours, than to cut them short and have them get hungry.
4. Keep the salt in front of them at all times. They seem to use less, and there is no big rush to get to it, which causes damage to the pasture and anxiety in the herd.

Questions?

