

Volume 6, Number 4
July/August 2001

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Chairman Drake shares some good news about recent GLCI successes.

Cover photograph:

One-month old lambs grazing with ewes. By the time these lambs are one-month old, at least 50% of their diet is grass.

GLCI News

Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative



Profitable Pasture Management

by Matthew Cunningham, Grassland Conservationist, USDA-NRCS, Chillicothe, Ohio

In a livestock enterprise whose profitability is based on forage, a producer must manage the production cycle of the animals around the production cycle of the grasses. Any deviation from this will lead to some form of increased inputs that will reduce net income. In a brood animal operation, late gestation and early lactation are most critical in terms of feed quality and quantity requirements. On our farm, grass is the most abundant and of high quality in late spring and early summer. That is the reason our ewes begin lambing on May 1st.

Pasture lambing is not a new concept, but it is time to reconsider its benefits over confinement shed lambing. It is receiving renewed attention because of the increased interest in getting away from high-input, labor-intensive types of livestock operations. The benefits of pasture lambing include reduced costs of purchased feed and reduced labor inputs.

Ewes coming off of stockpiled winter forages may be slightly poor in body condition. This is not a problem since they have the entire month of April to graze on early grass growth, and they will recover quite well. Unlike cattle, sheep have the ability to regain considerable body condition in the final stages of gestation because of their lower maintenance requirements. As the ewes lamb in May, forages far exceed adequate nutritional levels for lactation, as well as the nutritional requirements for the lambs as they begin to graze. By one month of age, at least half of the lambs' diet is grass.

The lambs are weaned from late summer to early fall. Early weaning is not as critical with sheep as it is with cattle because the gestation of sheep is only five months. Getting the ewes to breed back is not a concern because they have until December to gain adequate body condition. This provides a unique opportunity to use the ewes as a tool for pasture renovation. At weaning, lambs are put on good quality pastures, but the ewes go into the brush. Ewes are good browsers, and they do an excellent job eliminating such things as multiflora rose, ironweed and ragweed.

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Ewes and lambs on high quality spring pasture in south central Ohio.

By late fall, the brush looks like a battlefield, and the body condition of the flock is low.

Forage growth is slower in the fall than it is in the spring, but quality is at its highest. As the ewes are put back onto these grass pastures, their body condition recovers very quickly. In fact, by reducing the flock's body condition and then "flushing" the ewes on high quality fall pastures, ovulation and conception rates increase greatly. Fall pastures are also excellent for backgrounding lambs for the winter, as they will easily reach a weight of 65 pounds. This weight is adequate for tolerating harsh winter conditions, and it is not so large that it prevents economical feeding. Let's face it, a 65 pound animal requires less feed than a 90 pound animal, and will therefore be cheaper to keep through the winter.

Wintering lambs has proven to be a very good strategy. It allows us to market a lamb with lower purchased feed inputs as well as taking advantage of higher spring markets. As the lambs graze stockpiled forages in late winter, they are fed as much as one pound of shelled corn per head per day. In early spring they are shorn, and continue to graze. Having more livestock on the spring allows us to make better use of the excess forage. Finished lambs are marketed right off of the pastures with approximately \$8 per head worth of purchased feed inputs and at a market price typically above 90 cents per pound. For lambs fed in confinement during the winter, purchased feed inputs would have been more than \$17 per head, and the lambs would be finished at a time when the market price has not typically reached 80 cents per pound.

For livestock producers looking to receive the most profit from their forage production, matching the physiological requirements of the animal to the biological cycle of the grasses is the key to success. This principle of reducing feed and labor inputs through good forage management applies to all livestock grazing enterprises. The first step towards improving profitability is to honestly evaluate current management practices, and be willing to make adjustments. ■

Northeast Texas GLCI FIELD DAY

by David Polk, Rangeland Management Specialist,
USDA-NRCS, Palestine, TX



A very successful trial planting of Jiggs bermudagrass on the Hutchinson Ranch in Anderson County.

The Northeast Texas GLCI Project Area hosted a very successful grazing land field day in Anderson and Freestone Counties on May 14, 2001. More than 100 people attended the field day and technical tour to learn about new grass varieties, weed and brush control, grazing land management, and GLCI. Congressman Pete Sessions and two of his staff members attended the entire event.



Mr. James Durham discussed the demonstration plot of Tifton 85 bermudagrass he planted on his farm in Freestone County.

TIFTON 85 BERMUDAGRASS

The first stop was at the James Durham ranch, in the Butler community, to view his Tifton 85 bermudagrass planting. Mr. Durham discussed the planting and management techniques he used to establish Tifton 85. His ten-acre planting serves as a demonstration to inform local producers about this relatively new hybrid bermudagrass. Research in this area has shown that Tifton 85 out produces coastal bermudagrass with the same level of management.

GRAZING LAND CONSERVATION NEEDS

The next stop was at the Eskray Tippens ranch. Mr. Tippens' land needs extensive improvements. He has applied for cost-share assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Jimmy Oliver, Natural Resource Manager for the NRCS Palestine Resource Team, discussed conservation plan development on grazing lands and the conservation needs on this place. Items discussed included grade stabilization struc-

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Field Day ...

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ture, critical area treatment, weed and brush control, pasture planting, fertilization, fencing, rotational grazing, prescribed burning, and wildlife habitat management. Mr. Tippens is confident that technical assistance and good grazing land management will enable him to improve his land. He invited the group back to his ranch in a few years to see the changes for themselves.

EAST TEXAS BARBECUE AND GLCI

"East Texas" style barbecue was served in an oak grove on the Hutchinson ranch near the Tucker community. Besides the great barbecue, the audience also got a good dose of GLCI information during the lunch break. Jim Grumbles, Chairman of the Anderson-Houston SWCD, told how GLCI evolved and about the East Texas Grazing Lands Association. Bobby Wilson, vice-chairman of the Texas GLCI Coalition, discussed on-going activities in the state.

FROM WEEDS AND BRUSH TO GRASS

The afternoon was spent at the ranch of Dwight and J. W. Hutchinson. These young men have a commercial crossbred cow-calf operation. When they purchased the ranch a few years ago, weeds and brush dominated the neglected pastureland. They started cleaning up their pasture and contacted the local NRCS office for technical assistance. David Polk, NRCS coordinator for the Northeast Texas GLCI Project Area, worked with the Hutchinsons to develop a conservation plan.

Initially, the place consisted of three fields: one large pasture of common bermudagrass, a block of woods, and a hayland field of Alicia bermudagrass. The Hutchinson brothers cross-fenced the large pasture into four smaller pastures. Their fencing layout was designed to take advantage of existing ponds for livestock water, soils differences, and site potential as well as established forage types. After their fencing was complete, they implemented a rotational grazing system.



David Polk and Dwight Hutchinson discussed management of Alicia bermudagrass for hay on the Hutchinson Ranch.

They renovated two of the existing common bermudagrass pastures with aggressive weed and brush control and nutrient management programs. Lime, N, P, and K were applied according to

a soil test. Ryegrass was overseeded in both pastures. This enabled the Hutchinsons to reduce their hay and supplemental feed costs. They worked closely with Truman Lamb, Anderson County Extension Agent, to improve their herd management. Their cows maintained an adequate Body Condition Score that ensured recycling soon after calving and rebreeding within a 60-day period.



Congressman Pete Sessions participated in the field day and tour. He took the opportunity to discuss conservation and grazing land management with local livestock producers.

bermuda during the summer drought of 2000, the Hutchinsons decided to plant the remainder of the pasture to Jiggs. They prepared the seedbed during late winter/early spring and the field was planted earlier this spring.

The Alicia bermudagrass hay field and the wooded area continue to be well managed and contribute vital components to the overall forage and grazing management system on this ranch. Dwight Hutchinson and speakers for NRCS, Extension Service, and Dow AgroSciences talked about herd management, grazing management, weed and brush control, electric fencing, and management of Alicia and Jiggs bermudagrass.

Congressman Pete Sessions and NRCS State Conservationist, John Burt, addressed the group at the end of the day. Throughout the day, there was healthy exchange of information between participants and speakers. This field day was an excellent example of how GLCI promotes educational assistance to grazing land producers. It also demonstrated the importance of technical assistance, partnerships, and cooperation in the successful management of grazing land resources.

Sponsors for the event included Texas GLCI Coalition, East Texas Grazing Lands Association, Anderson-Houston Soil and Water Conservation District, Freestone Soil and Water Conservation District, Texas Agricultural Extension Service, East Texas Independent Cattlemen's Association, and Dow AgroSciences. ■

One clayey bottomland site was left as a range-land pasture to increase the diversity of forage types and wildlife habitat for the ranch. Brush species such as locust, elm, and persimmons are being controlled in the pasture. Brush control and rotational grazing will improve the rangeland health of this pasture.

The fourth pasture had very little perennial grass cover. The Hutchinsons agreed to try a trial planting of eight acres of Jiggs bermudagrass. Based on the successful establishment of this new hybrid

THE CHAIR'S CORNER

The National GLCI represents a broad base of support for resource conservation. Each member organization brings specific ideas and influences to the National GLCI Steering Committee and to Congress. These relationships provide a unique opportunity to make things happen. Personal contacts with Congress and their staff members have led to the development of a proposed stand-alone bill referred to as the Conservation of Private Lands Act (CPLA). Senator Larry Craig from Idaho submitted CPLA to legislative council for appropriate language and preparation for the formal introduction of the bill. A lot of work remains to be done, and we will continue to track the progress of CPLA legislation.

Through public awareness and education, several state coalitions have seen excellent growth in new organizations becoming partners in the GLCI process. Non-traditional groups with special interests in wildlife, water quality, and wildflowers are supporting GLCI at the grassroots level. Several states have hosted legislative field days to heighten awareness of grazing land resource management to the public and members of Congress. We are seeing grazing land considerations in the Conservation Security Act, Grassland Reserve Act and discussions about carbon sequestration. This is good news for all of us.

Growth and persistence have allowed us to establish new positions. I want to welcome Margareta "Meg" Bishop aboard as the new Regional GLCI Coordinator for the West. Meg is headquartered in Phoenix. Her work territory includes the states of Alaska, Arizona, California, Hawaii, Idaho, New Mexico, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, and Washington, as well as the Pacific Basin. We look forward to Meg becoming a part of the GLCI team.

GLCI needs victories, and I am happy to share some with you.

Bob Drake, Chairman

National GLCI Steering Committee