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A voluntary partnership with private landowners

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This family has taken the stress out of calving season.

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A great line-up of educational grazing events are planned for this summer and fall.

Pictured Above: Rick and Marlis Doud ranch with their son Jared near Midland, SD.

GLCI News



Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative

Excited About Ranching Again

Rotational grazing and a switch to May-June calving have re-energized this South Dakota ranch operation.

By Kindra Gordon

"Haying all summer and feeding all winter," is how Rick and Marlis Doud felt they were spending their time on their commercial cow-calf operation near Midland, S.D. The ranch encompasses 6,000 deeded acres and 2,500 leased acres on which the Doud's run nearly 400 commercial Angus and black baldie cow-calf pairs.

The Doud's established their ranch in the early 1970's and operated it like many ranches in the region – calving in March and April and selling calves in early November.

But, by the late 90's, Rick and Marlis were frustrated – they were running five different herds with season-long grazing from June 1 to October 15 (four and a half months). Winter pastures were being grazed and supplemental hay fed for the remaining seven and a half months of the year. This cycle led to that feeling of putting up hay all summer and feeding it all winter.

Rick says he knew something had to change; rotational grazing was in the back of his mind. So in 1999, he attended the Ranching for Profit School to learn more about grazing management. Rick calls his first experience with the school an "eye-opener," and eager to learn more, he repeated the Ranching for Profit School in 2000. By that time, he was ready to start experimenting with rotating two herds through three pastures each.

After seeing some benefits from running two herds each through a three pasture rotation, the Doud's were eager to try rotational grazing again in 2001. They worked with their local Natural Resources Conservation Service to begin implementing some cross-fencing and install water pipelines and tanks, as well as design a grazing plan.

Despite the scant rain that summer, they pursued the rotational grazing, and noticed that every time they moved the herd, the cattle acted like it was lush, new regrowth – even though little regrowth was apparent to the naked eye.

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Grazing Managers

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The Next Leap

In 2002, the Doud's made their biggest management leap by combining the two big herds into one and moving their calving date to May 12. Rick explains that they move all cows – including first calf heifers – to summer pasture after May 1 and start rotating the single herd through seven different pastures while calving. Their first rotation is anywhere from five to ten days per pasture. The second rotation is from eight to fourteen days with most pastures getting a rest period from 30 to 90 days. Some of the pastures are only grazed a total of 13 days out of the year.

Breeding season has also been simplified. Rather than five herds, the Doud's split the herd into a mature cowherd and first calf heifers and run bulls for 60 days. Bulls are turned out the first week of August.

Rick says changing his thinking and management have been the best choice he's ever made for the ranch. "I always thought if I stayed home and worked hard, I'd be successful, but that traditional route wasn't working. This has gotten me excited about ranching again. There's a great opportunity out there if we can get away from the old-style of calving in February and March. It's time to change," he says.

The Doud's have seen abundant rewards from their improved grassland management and move to summer calving. Even through severe drought from 2001-2008, they report improvement in the productivity and diversity of the grasses in the rotated pastures which has increased carrying capacity. As a result, the Doud's are consider expanding their herd numbers in the future.

Additionally, Rick estimates feed costs on the ranch have been reduced by 60-75%. While Doud still puts up some hay, he is grazing more of his hay land, and is able to primarily graze his livestock throughout the winter, except for the few occasions when the land is covered with too much snow.

The Doud's believe their cows are quieter and less stressed with the new system as well – which they believe ultimately equates to less health management costs and more pounds of beef being produced from the land.

The Doud's note that their management changes have resulted in some returns that are difficult to put a monetary value on. Marlis sums it up this way, "It seems like before, when calving season rolled around everything was so tense. Now by calving in May and June, the anxiety has been taken out of calving season. It's a lot less work and we are much more relaxed. We have more **quality** to our life."

Editor's Note: The Doud's were named the inaugural Leopold Conservation award winner in South Dakota in 2010.

PASTURE MANAGEMENT TIPS:

It was a wet and soggy spring in the much of the east and central part of the United States. As a result, Karen Hoffman, who produces the GLCI Gazette Newsletter in New York reports that the two most popular questions this spring were, "How should I be grazing when it's so wet like this, and not damage my pastures?" and "Is there anything cheaper than corn to feed as an energy supplement?"

She provided this input:

The quick answer to the first one is that you should either shorten your residency period on any wet paddocks, or reduce the stocking rate on those paddocks. In other words, if your animals are there for less time, there is less time for them to do a lot of damage. Fewer animals have the same effect if you can't shorten how much time they are in a paddock, because there's less hoof action. A little bit of "pugging" isn't bad for a pasture, as it allows new plants to fill in the areas that get dug up. However, turning a pasture into a complete mud hole isn't a good idea. If you can't use either strategy, you may want to keep the animals off those wet pasture altogether.

Barley, oats, molasses, wheat byproducts, beet pulp, citrus pulp, hominy, triticale or spelt grain...there are a lot of alternatives to corn for energy. Many of them have slightly lower energy content than corn, so you might not be able to substitute them on a one to one ratio. Check prices and push the pencil on whether or not these alternatives are a good buy – of course, with increased demand for them, the prices are moving upwards as well. If you're thinking about reducing feeding rates, recognize that you will also give up some production, either milk or meat. This is another pencil-pushing exercise you need to go through to be sure that the production loss won't cost you more than what you save on grain costs.



Meet The GLCI Steering Committee

Visit the newly redesigned GLCI website for more information

Established in 1991, the Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI) is a national effort that has always worked toward the mission of providing high quality technical assistance on America's privately owned grazing lands.

Nine member organizations were involved in the initiation of GLCI and today support and guide the GLCI mission on a national level through representation on the GLCI Steering Committee. The organizations involved include the American Farm Bureau Federation, American Forage and Grassland Council, American Sheep Industry, Dairy Industry, National Association of Conservation Districts, National Cattlemen's Beef Association, National Farmers Union, Society for Range Management and the Soil and Water Conservation Society.

Furthermore, nearly 40 states have coalitions devoted to providing private landowners with information, guidance and technical assistance on range, pasture and grasslands.

The current GLCI Steering Committee includes the following individuals – for a listing of others involved in GLCI activities visit www.glc.org and click on “Who’s Involved.”

Chairman: Bob Drake, Oklahoma, (NCBA)
Vice-Chair: Howard Straub, Jr., Michigan, (Dairy Industry)
Secretary/Treasurer: James K. “Rooter” Brite, Jr., Texas, (NACD)
Rod Baumberger, South Dakota (SWCS)
Keith Bartholomay, North Dakota (SRM)
Dave Forgey, Indiana (AFGC)
Aggie Helle, Montana (Sheep Industry)
Duane Hertzler, Pennsylvania (Dairy Industry)
Gerald Jaeger, Wisconsin (NFU)
Bob Lee, Montana (NCBA)
Richard McElhaney, Pennsylvania (AFBF)
Tim Munns, Utah (SWCS)
Pat Pfeil, Florida (SRM)
John Spain, Arkansas (AFGC)
Gretchen Sammis, New Mexico (NACD)
Margaret Soulen-Hinson, Idaho (Sheep Industry)

Steering Committee Alternates: Larry Hensley, Oklahoma (National Farmer’s Union); Bob McCan, Texas (NCBA); Joe Sicking, Nevada (NACD); Bill Tucker, Virginia (AFGC)

GLCI Emeritus Members: Flavius Barker, Tennessee; Jack Cutshall, Louisiana; John “Chip” Merrill, Texas; Frank Philp, Wyoming; Bud Purdy, Idaho



STATE GLCI UPDATES

Utah – In April, the Utah Grazing Improvement Board (UGIP) agreed to become the new state affiliate organization of the GLCI, replacing the Utah Grazing Network (UGN), which has fallen into inactivity. The group will continue to work with NRCS and other entities to fund information and education activities on grazing lands. Darrell Johnson was nominated to chair Utah’s grazing network activities.

Georgia – The Georgia Grazing Lands Conservation Coalition has been selected as recipient of the 2011 Merit Award from the Georgia Chapter of the Soil and Water Conservation Society. The Georgia GLCC was recognized for its role in “providing grazing land managers with information on sustainable farming practices for grazing land conservation and grazing land ecosystem health to promote quality forage and livestock production which exemplifies the Society’s mission of fostering the science and the art of soil, water, and related natural resource management to achieve sustainability.”

South Dakota – The South Dakota Grassland Coalition hosted its annual bird tour in mid-June. The annual event provides an opportunity to bring bird lovers together with landowners/livestock producers to learn about conservation and grazing practices that are beneficial to all creatures. The SDGC is also initiating a mentoring network within the state to help share conservation and grazing management information with other landowners. The Nebraska and North Dakota GLCI affiliates already offer similar mentoring networks.



Save the Date for these Upcoming Grazing Events

- **2011 Nebraska Grazing Conference**, August 9-10, Holiday Inn, Kearney, Nebraska
<http://www.grassland.unl.edu/grazeconf.htm>
 - **America's Grasslands Conference**, Aug. 15-17, Sioux Falls, South Dakota. The conference will be immediately followed by a Grasslands Policy Summit on Aug. 17018, sponsored by the National Wildlife Federation and Ducks Unlimited. *For more information email SDSU's Susan Rupp at susan.rupp@sdstate.edu.*
 - **The Grassfed Exchange Conference**, Sept. 16-17, Northeast Community College, Norfolk, NE. Visit www.grassfedexchange.com.
 - **King Ranch Institute for Ranch Management Symposium: Practical Management of Hunting Enterprises on Working Ranches**, Oct. 27-28, Kingsville, TX. Visit <http://krirm.tamuk.edu/> for details.
 - **"New Agrarians: How the Next Generation of Leaders Tackle 21st Century Challenges"** is the theme of the Quivira Coalition's 10th Anniversary Conference planned for Tuesday - Thursday, November 8 - 10, in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Learn more at www.quiviracoalition.org or find them on Facebook.
 - **23rd Range Beef Cow Symposium**, Nov. 29-Dec. 1 in Mitchell, Neb. For more information, contact Karla Jenkins at (308) 632-1245 or kjenkins2@unl.edu.
 - **Society for Range Management 65th Annual Meeting**; January 29 - February 3, 2012 in Spokane, WA.

To have your GLCI activities or upcoming events highlighted in this newsletter, contact Kindra Gordon at phone 605-722-7699 or kindras@gordonresources.com.

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Visit the GLCI homepage at <http://www.glc-i.org>

American Farmland Trust	(202) 884-3308
Grassland Council	(800) 944-2342
American Sheep Industry	(300) 771-3500
Dairy Industry	(517) 323-6775
National Association of Conservation Districts	(202) 547-6233
National Farmers Union	(202) 554-1600
Beef Association	(202) 347-0228
National Cattlemen's Beef	(202) 547-0228
National Association of Conservation Districts	(202) 547-6233
Conservation Society	(300) 771-3309
Soil and Water Conservation	(515) 289-2331

Contact these affiliated organizations: