

Nature of the Beast

By the time you read this, the Grazing school will be over. My presentation is on the behavior of grazing animals. I guess I have been fascinated with this, since I've heard some of the old wives' tales about cattle facing into a storm etc. etc. Plus, I didn't get to take Dr Owensby's class at KSU, so I'm self-taught!

Cattle's first choice of eating in the pasture is new growth or regrowth. We learned this lesson one year, when we only burned one side of a native pasture. The cattle camped out on the side that was burned. Their second choice will be mature green leaves, third pick is green stems and then mature dry leaves and then if forced, dry stems. Now we've all seen those pastures where they are forced to eat everything, even the grass under hedge trees and multi flora rose!

There is no scientific evidence to support that cattle have nutritional wisdom. They cannot determine whether or not they need a certain mineral or vitamin.

When forage is plentiful and good, they will spend less time grazing and more time resting. Of course when the grass is not good, they will have to graze longer. If you use a higher stocking rate, they will graze longer, competing for the best grass. If the grass is short they will graze longer, because they will not be able to sweep up the grass with their tongues.

Small herds in small pastures stay together. They will graze all together when grass is plentiful. When forage becomes scarce, they will graze individually.

It is optimum to have watering sources 400 to 600 yards away, if it's longer they will travel to water as a group. Which can hurt your gains as well.

Cattle will avoid areas that have their feces, sheep are not as particular. Urine is only a short term aversion for cattle.

Of course, when you see cattle in ponds early in the season, you can suspect horn flies. Later in the year, when temperatures rise, it could be a cooling off trick, especially in fescue pastures.

Cattle will bunch together in heavy fly infestations.

Of course, every herd has the boss cow. The pecking order is quickly established when placed in the pasture. Hopefully, your pastures will stand up in this dry stretch, and may your boss cow be a pet!

