

LIVESTOCK

Grazing program maximizes profit

By JOANN PIPKIN

GREG and Jan Judy have started a unique landscaping business. Farms and farmettes within a five-mile radius of their farm home near Clark are well manicured, even park-like. But the Judys don't push lawn mowers — they push 1,400-pound cows.

"We are basically a landscaping service," Greg says. "The cattle are our employees. The only difference is we charge our cows to work for us."

The results leave their customers with smiles on their faces and the Judys with money in the bank.

It all started when the couple noticed that numerous fields around them were being mowed and baled. Most landowners were giving the hay to anybody who would cut it and haul it off. "The landowner thought he was doing his land a favor; he didn't realize he was bankrupting his soil by hauling the hay off each year," Greg says.

Seeking out idle, unfenced land within a five-mile radius of their farm, the Judys are bending the curve on working with absentee landowners. Once a parcel is secured, they construct fence that will be conducive to the "mob density grazing" program they learned last year at a holistic management conference in New Mexico.

Greg maintains it is imperative to establish some type of rotational grazing system to keep the property looking like a park. Once fencing is in order, the Judys bring in the live lawn mowers.

Serious business

It's an enterprise that has proved fruitful for the central Missouri couple. "We've

Key Points

- Greg and Jan Judy target farmettes for leased grazing-land profits.
- They seek out idle land within a five-mile radius of their farm for grazing.
- They also educate landowners on the benefits of forage improvement.

used other people's cattle and other people's land to build our finances so that we're able to afford our own cattle herd — which is now debt free," Greg says. Custom grazing has also afforded the Judys cattle handling equipment and a flock of sheep.

Leasing small acreages gives the Judys flexibility with their grazing program. Greg cites leased land as his unfair advantage. "Our highest lease is \$5 to \$6 per acre per year," he says, "but that is for land that doesn't already have fence or water on it." And, the Judys put their own money back into that land to help improve it.

"We're in the grass-growing business," Greg explains. "If we continually graze the grass and abuse it, we're going to be out of business. That 8 to 10 inches of grass is just like a savings account. It's paying you interest."

Mutual benefits

Landowners get more bang for their buck from the Judys, too. "We build ponds, stock them with fish and fence the pond off from the cattle," Greg notes. Pasture forages are improved, which attracts more wildlife and increases hunting capabilities — a major drawing card for many of the absentee landowners.

The Judys say those landowners also



COWS FOR HIRE: Greg Judy moves cows to new pasture every day with the "mob grazing" system he's established. Working with absentee landowners, Greg and his wife, Jan, improve pastures on leased grazing land.



NEW-AGE GRAZERS: Innovative thinking and grazing have allowed Greg and Jan Judy to increase farm profits and expand their livestock business.



FRESH FORAGE: High-intensity grazing results in a fresh bite of grass every day for cows.

appreciate having someone manage and look after their land. "We are their ears and eyes," Greg says.

Establishing a written lease is important for both the leased land and custom grazing, according to the Judys. "You must cover every detail."

An open line of communication with the landowner is vital to the life of the lease, the couple notes. They keep in contact with the landowner at least biweekly. By dropping an email to the landowner and sending photos of the property, or even a short video, he or she is able to actually see progress that is taking place.

"You want your landowner to be your strongest supporter," Greg explains.

"You must educate them to the benefits of planned grazing and how it will improve their farm."

As Missouri farmland continues to be gobbled up by development and divided into smaller acreages, the Judys see endless opportunities for farmers to capitalize on the very concept in which they are blazing the trail.

"Get out and look around your neighborhood," Greg says. "You might be surprised what you find."

Pipkin writes from Republic.

Editor's note: Greg Judy further outlines custom grazing in his book, "No Risk Ranching." Call him at 573-874-1816 for more information.

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'Mob' concept helps replenish grass

GRAZIER Greg Judy believes a technique called "mob grazing" is better for farms — and livestock.

He has been using the mob concept, also known as high-intensity grazing, since last summer. With the Management-intensive Grazing system he was using previously, he says precious grass was being lost.

"The grass was kept short and vegetative at 3 to 4 inches, but the custom-grazed cattle would have to be shipped off in July because there was no grass."

With mob grazing, the Clark farmer has divided pastures into 5- or 10-acre paddocks, which are then subdivided. Stocking rates are kept at 250,000 to 300,000 pounds (178 to 215 head of cattle) per acre for daily rotation.

Greg says the mob grazing program is helping restore perennial warm-season grasses to the land. Under the old MiG system with 30 to 35 days of rest, the warm-season grasses were being grazed before they could ever start growing. With a longer rotation in the mob system, pastures get 70 to 80 days of rest — plenty of time for warm-season grass establishment.

While some might think cattle under the mob grazing system are cramped in too tight of space, the grazer disagrees. "Every single day those cows get a fresh, untrampled salad bar. These girls have got a good life."