



RE-GROWTH—Dale Lasater, operating manager of the Lasater Ranch, points out the re-growth of grass in a recently vacated grazing paddock. Lasater

recently has implemented the resource management practices—promoted by Allen Savory—in the pastures and two grazing cells located on the Elbert

County, Colo., ranch. The grass Lasater is pointing out represents a six-day growth. (Journal photo by Diane James.)

Lasater's way is nature's way

By Diane James

The Lasater ranch, Matheson, Colo., long has been recognized as the founding home of the Beefmaster cattle breed.

In the early years, Tom Lasater was referred to as a "maverick" by the beef industry. His revolutionary idea of producing and selecting breeding animals solely on their ability to produce beef—rather than breed characteristics and show ring dictates—was met with skepticism.

But through the years, the Lasaters have come to be known for their outstanding Beefmaster bloodlines and progeny; and their personal management ideals have slowly earned the respect of the industry.

Tom Lasater, a native Texan, moved the family operation to the Elbert County location in 1948. Today, the ranch spreads over 28,500 acres of range and is managed by Lasater's son, Dale.

Dale Lasater credits the size and quality of their herd and the expansion of the ranch to his father's foresight and determination. He also is a firm

believer in the ideals and standards set by his father.

Perhaps the single most important belief the Lasaters hold is to let Mother Nature do the work. They only step in and give her a little help once in a while.

According to Lasater, his father firmly believes nature has a very good reason for what she does. And it is the Lasater way to allow nature to do what she thinks is best. This philosophy effects every single aspect of their operation. It is "survival of the fittest" for the cattle and the wildlife that make their home on the ranch's domain.

The Lasaters allow no hunting, trapping or poisoning of predators; no artificial seeding of the range; and no use of chemicals for weed and insect control. All predator, insect and range control is left up to Mother Nature's food chain.

The latest step the Lasaters have taken to promote nature's natural selection is to become involved with Allen Savory, the former South African wildlife and range specialist.

Savory's grazing and resource management philosophies have revolutionized the thinking of many ranchers and federal land managers faced with the increasing problem of fast-paced deterioration of this country's fragile rangeland.

Savory's range management theories challenge existing management practices by asserting worn out pasture land needs a short, intensive grazing, which will break up the soil and re-seed the native grasses. This process is followed by a brief rest which allows the animals' "preferred" vegetation to grow back and stops the spread of undesired and often unpalatable plants and grasses from slowly taking over the range.

This theory conflicts with the current practice of spreading fewer numbers of cattle over larger expanses of range—a practice commonly referred to as understocking.

It was witnessing the effects of understocking practices in South Africa which triggered Savory's interest and belief that

understocking was hurting—not helping the land.

Savory had observed large game herds, numbering in the thousands, grazing on lush and productive range land. He was curious why these lands under heavy grazing and trampling were much more healthy and productive than the land under smaller numbers of livestock.

Savory finally became convinced overgrazing was not related to excessive grazing numbers, but to the amount of time the herd grazed in a particular area.

He supported this theory by pointing to the migration of the huge antelope and buffalo herds of Africa and America, which always grazed on the move.

These herds never stayed in one area longer than a few days, thereby giving plants and the soil time to recover before the herds returned.

Since hitting upon this revolutionary concept, Savory has spent the last 30 years teaching and promoting his theory of Holistic Resource Management through personal consultations,

seminars and at his school based in Albuquerque, N.M.

Dale Lasater was first exposed to Savory's theories and practices through the experiences of close friends and his brother-in-law's experiences in San Angelo, Texas.

Lasater admitted he was intrigued by the results he had seen, and by the practice that "utilized nature to its fullest." In the fall of 1984, he and his wife, Janine, attended Savory's school for Holistic Resource Management in Albuquerque.

Lasater was impressed with Savory's ideas and with his approach focusing on the entire ranch operation from grass and personnel management to finance and record keeping.

"One of the most important things I have learned from Savory's holistic approach is to focus on how certain systems function together better as a whole, and are weaker when they are used separately," Lasater comments. "You realize right away this approach requires

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Lasater ranch implements revolutionary grazing practice

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more intensive labor and management. It is very important the people involved with the implementation of the practices know—and fully understand—the holistic concept."

Lasater plans to send his ranch foreman, Kerry Mosier, to Savory's school in Grand Junction, Colo., this summer. This will help Mosier to fully understand the holistic approach and utilize it in the newly installed grazing cells and pastures on the ranch.

Lasater is very optimistic about the benefits the operation will receive from implementing the holistic management techniques.

"I believe our grass is in pretty good shape as it is," Lasater says. "There hasn't been a lot of erosion, and through natural selection, the more hardy and productive grasses have flourished."

"I believe the grass will provide an excellent starting point for implementing Savory's practices."

The young rancher has built two grazing cells which utilize the ranch's existing windmill system. He plans to have a third cell in use by mid-summer.

The cells will have a dual role. They will utilize and improve the ranges' productivity and carrying capacity; and separate the Lasater's purebred seedstock.

"One cell covers 3,000 acres and has two windmills servicing the 160-acre paddocks (within the cell)," Lasater explains. "This cell will hold about 80 head of sale females."

"The second cell covers about 4,000 acres and it handles 160 head of sale bulls. The third cell will cover 2,500 acres divided into four paddocks. It will hold 190 replacement heifers when it is completed."

Lasater says the remaining pastures—not under cell management—are still managed under the holistic approach.

"For years, we followed a seasonal rotation from our summer to winter pastures. Every year, the same pastures were used or rested at the same time."

"But the holistic approach teaches you the two most important things in managing the range are to monitor the amount of time you are on it—and the time of year it is in use."

"Now we make sure we move the herds through the pastures according to the rate the cattle graze down the grass. And we try to avoid going onto a pasture at the same time we were on it last year."

Lasater believes this approach is just as effective as using the cell method. "The cell is just a tool that helps improve the cattle and the range's performance. A person does not have to go out and re-fence and re-water their pastures to utilize Savory's practices. You can adapt it to almost any existing pasture," he points out.

Lasater admits it is a learning process for him and his men. What is learned from the actual implementation of theories and management of the cells and pastures is reviewed on a day-to-day basis. "You have to work with this system every day," he says. "You can't drive out in your pickup once a week to see if the cattle have enough to eat. You have to check the grass itself to see how fast the cattle are eating it down; and how soon it will be before they come back for the second serious bite on the more preferred plants."

The second bite he refers to is what facilitates the erosion problem. Once an animal has eaten all the preferred plants, it will move back to the area it first grazed for a second bite of a preferred plant. Lasater says the second bite damages and weakens the plant, which makes it easier for the less favored plants to grow stronger and eventually take over the range.

He can cite two instances on the ranch where high nutrient forage grasses and shrubs had been "eaten into oblivion" because they were greatly preferred by the cattle.

Today, with the aid of Soil Conservation Service agronomists, Lasater is charting the types of grasses and shrubs existing in the cells and pastures. This will provide him with a re-

cord of what forage the cattle tend to graze the fastest, and help them plan the grazing rotations to utilize the favored forages when they are in season and rest them during the off-season.

The current rotations are based on the re-growth of the grass. If grass growth is fast, the herd will be rotated into a paddock about every four to six days. If growth is slow, the herd may not be moved for eight to 10 days.

Lasater says he is conditioning the herds to move at the sound of a whistle. So all they would need to do to move the herd into the next paddock would be to open a gate and blow the whistle.

"We have had two of our cells in use for about a month, but the cattle already are conditioned to the electric fence, and they are beginning to realize the whistle means fresh grass," he says.

The electric fence Lasater put in to section off the paddocks was the only construction and major expense he had in implementing the cell layout. Altogether he put in 20 miles of Snell electric fence, a powerful, patented fence created in Australia.

The cells' paddocks are square or rectangular in shape and layout, in order to take advantage of existing water sites. Lasater had the single wire fence placed at 34 inches (height) for the cows and 30 inches for the yearlings. He allowed the extra four inches in the cows' cells to permit calves freedom to move safely under the wire. This, he says, ensures pairs will not become separated during a paddock rotation.

Since the Lasater's new grazing practice is still in the very early stages of implementation, it is hard to predict how it will effect the ranch's carrying capacity; and whether or not it will increase beef gains. But one thing is clear—if hard work, optimism and faith have any influence on the outcome—the results should be very rewarding for the Lasaters.

Dale Lasater is encouraged with the grass growth he has seen in just the few weeks the paddocks have been in use. And he feels the Holistic Resource Management approach can do nothing but good on land which has basically utilized "nature's way" for over 40 years.

"My dad's approach, and what we are trying to carry on now, is to let nature take her course," Lasater says. "And with a holistic management approach, we will attempt to facilitate and utilize to our best advantage what nature accomplishes on her own."

FCCA appoints senior marketing officer

Colorado
The Denver-based Farm Credit Corporation of America (FCCA) has announced the appointment of Robert F. Miller as senior vice president of marketing and public affairs. Miller served most recently as senior vice president of marketing and public affairs at AmeriTrust, Cleveland, Ohio. Established in 1985 to provide leadership and support services for the \$65 billion Farm Credit System, FCCA serves as a vehicle for developing system policies and guidelines.



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