



HRCDA INTENSIVE GRAZING AREA

The HRCDA Intensive Grazing Area was established by the Warren County Conservation District to demonstrate the affects of rotational grazing. The 26 acre field was originally fallow and weed choked. Through the practice of management intensive grazing (MIG) and some mowing, this pasture was transformed into a high quality and highly productive stand of cool season grasses and legumes such as two different clover species.

MIG is the art of splitting a large pasture into several smaller paddocks and rotating cattle from one paddock as the grasses are grazed off to the next lush section of ground. As the animals are rotated around the field, previously grazed paddocks are rested allowing for vegetative re-growth and subsequent re-grazing.

This pasture management system provides highly nutritious forages for optimal animal performance. MIG is also healthy for the environment in several ways. The manure from the animals is deposited by the animals over a large area such that the manure nutrients can be efficiently utilized by the growing grasses. The resulting dense sod base and grass sward also prevents soil erosion and helps with water infiltration. These environmental attributes all help toward the prevention of non-point source pollution.

Ten of the current herd of resident cattle are owned by the Conservation District as a fundraising project. We also use them as a demonstration of how cattle can thrive on a properly managed pasture with no grain supplements.



This demonstration is unique in two ways. First, it exemplifies how fallow and weed infested farmland can be restored to high quality pasture without the use of tillage or herbicides. When the broad leafed weeds are grazed or mowed away, that gives the cool season grasses a chance to compete for sunlight and soil nutrition. The seeds of these grasses are awaiting germination in what is referred to as a seed bank. This is the collection of seeds over many seasons, some of which remain viable in the upper layer of soil for forty or more years. Once the cool season grasses and legumes take hold, controlled grazing and the hoof action grinding manure into the sod continues to make this soil more favorable for the pasture grasses which then out-compete the

weeds. This method of pasture reclamation works best when you confine a larger group of animals over a small section of pasture for a short period of time. This insures that all the plants are evenly grazed and the manure is adequately distributed. Some of the larger beef producers in the Midwest shoot for one million pounds of beef per acre of grass and move them to new paddocks several times per day. Our herd size is 17 animals and we rotate them on average every third day.

The second point that we can make with this project is that raising beef cattle can be done with relatively little infrastructure. Fencing, water troughs, and careful management are all you need. Wintering the animals can be done as simply as a stabilized pad of gravel for a wintering lot where the animals are fed hay. A windbreak is all that is needed for shelter.



MIG is good for the animals, good for the environment, and good for the farmer through increased profitability due to no grain or feed costs and reduced veterinary and labor expenses.