

Pasture Renovation

Contributed by Jason Pierce
Thursday, 10 April 2008
Last Updated Thursday, 10 April 2008

One of the first things we had to accomplish to start raising our cattle naturally on pasture was to renovate our current grazing land. Part of what we wanted to accomplish is to extend the grazing period so the steers we are finishing on grass have access to green forage as many months of the year as possible.

For us that meant the first step was to evaluate our soil and see what could be done to get it to the best possible condition. The first thing we done was to send off a soil sample, our sample results came back and reported that we had acidic soil. Because we are in a fairly heavy rainfall area acidic soil is very common here. One of our goals was to introduce more diverse grazing by adding legumes like clover and alfalfa for nitrogen fixation and longer grazing season. Because of the PH requirements of these legumes we had to add lime.

Adding Lime - Even though most of the pasture here is acidic most ranchers do not add lime. I believe this is mainly because most grasses tolerate low PH soil much better than legumes and the lime requirements can make it very expensive on a large scale. However after a lot of research we concluded that the introduction of a more diverse grazing system will help us reach our goals. So in the winter of 2007/2008 we had 80 tons of lime delivered and spread it with a rented spreader.

Adding the lime proved troublesome due to a very wet winter. Once the lime would get wet it would then freeze making it almost impossible to run through the spreader. However because lime takes up to a year to react with the soil we wanted to get it on the ground as soon as we possibly could. Moving forward I plan to start adding lime in the late summer on those warm dry days.

Planting - After all the lime was spread we put our attention to determining what seeds and at what rate we would be planting. Like i mentioned above we wanted to introduce legumes to the pasture. After a lot of research and visiting with our extension agent we settled on a mixture of Red Clover, White Clover, and Alfalfa. We used an old IH grain drill with Jerry Oats mixed in with our legume seed. Because the legume seed is so small we needed the oats to help regulate how much was applied.

The biggest concern with this method of planting was getting the small legume seeds to deep. After a little tweaking we were able to set the drill up just the way we wanted. There is of course other ways to plant legumes, but this worked very well for us because we already had this equipment.

Within 2 weeks of planting the seed we started to see the clover and oats emerge, now we are seeing some alfalfa. Overall we have had a cool wet spring so I expect that after the soil warms a little more the everything will really take off.