

Observations Of A County Vet *Diversity*

DR. ROBERT MCCRORY

BENTON, KY.

Diversity is the big word now. Once we said "don't put all our eggs in one basket." What we really need to do is solve problems with different methods. Let's talk pastures because that's what I spend most of my time thinking about.

We like to think of ourselves as cattle people but we are really pasture farmers. In the field we will have whatever we cultivate or whatever happens to be there according to how the field is handled. Overgrazing will produce bare ground, weeds, and dead soil due to lack of protection from summer heat. Erosion will result from lack of plants to hold rain water. Undergrazing will result in wild plants and trees taking over. Balanced grazing is like baby bear's soup.

To do this we need to have animals that will eat every plant in the field. Goats are great at eating briars, bushes, multiflora rose, thorn trees and the like. Sheep like broadleaf weeds as well as grass. Cattle eat everything else. There is even a place for a grazing type hog (Tamworth). Each one of the small animals will be more profitable than cattle. Sheep (hair) will pay for themselves every year and you still have the originals. They require no shearing, foot trimming, worming or any surgical procedures. They don't work on wet ground. Coyotes like them so a predator dog may be needed. Goats are profitable and are more delicate at kidding time. They are also escape artists. I prefer the old Texas goat since they are trouble free.

Crossing with a boar billy is probably the best of both worlds. To do this requires a good woven wire exterior fence.

One can still mob graze the cows and let the others go wherever they wish. A creep feeder for the lambs and kids will pay. It can be at the barn where they like to hang out. Small ruminants can live off pasture alone except in January, February and March when the babies are born.

Soy gluten hulls are good cheap feed. Red clover hay works for me along with the hulls. With all the problems in the world we have there is nothing more soothing than watching lambs and kids romp and play. I believe a person could take a rough place put a fence around it and use the above program and in a few years have an outstanding pasture. The only input would be the fence and what hay and hulls is brought in.

In one instance I read about, the writer reported that after five years his soil was in better shape and had more organic matter than one that was tested and treated with chemical fertilizers. Weeds and briars do not develop resistance to goats, as a matter of fact if one is not careful all the good goat food can be destroyed and one will have to buy another farm. Here in my county many years ago we had a man who did just that. He would buy an old farm, put 100 goats on it and sell the farm and goats at the proper time. When he died he had lots of real estate and interest in several banks. Δ

DR. ROBERT MCCRORY: Veterinarian, Benton, Kentucky



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