



In this column, we have questioned, cajoled, exhorted, agitated, needled, took shots at and generally held a dim view of some of our traditions, practices, institutions, philosophies, and methods of raising cattle.

One can argue that the billions of dollars invested in the cattle business surely must be invested wisely. Given the sad state of our finances, one can argue just as convincingly that some major changes need be adopted. We will subscribe to the latter.

## Start with an "aerial"

By Willy Kilmer  
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Planning, initiating, monitoring, and using a planned, intensive, rotational grazing system is undoubtedly one of the most profound changes available to improve our lot.

How to begin? Where to start? What all need be considered? In a *column*, we'll attempt what can't be covered in a *tome*.

The first and biggest task is mental—a complete turnabout in our thinking. A questioning of our current methods.

As we perform each task in caring for our livestock, we ask whether the animals themselves can do it cheaper and better. As we make plans to plant a crop, we investigate the possibility of using grass and legumes; perennials that require no annual expenditure of cash, chemicals, fuel, seed, fertilizer, equipment, and soil erosion. Even when these perennials are in place we need to consider every means of letting livestock harvest them as opposed to the waste and expense of using mechanical means.

When this is accomplished, when we have our attitude adjusted, then we are ready to begin.

In order to properly plan the system, an aerial photo of the area is essential. It is fairly common to try to fit a cell or rotational grazing system onto existing range or pasture. Quite often it is more desirable to look beyond and consider how adjoining or nearby land could fit into the plan. Even though the cost of cross-fencing is minimal using the newer electronic, smooth-wire technology, it is still more efficient to keep the paddocks as large as possible. We would like to have a minimum of six or eight paddocks in a system, but we can settle for four or so for a while as adjoining fields are seeded to grass and legumes and worked into the rotation.

It is my considered opinion that far too much portable and temporary fencing has been used in rotational grazing systems. The time, effort, and money spent on them could better have

been used installing permanent fences with appropriate numbers and location of gates. There's not much that can destroy a good rotation as quickly as a quarter or half mile of portable fence that has to be moved when other duties demand attention. Opening one gate and closing another in a permanent fence is the preferred option.

Some very primary considerations come into play as a plan crystalizes. Widely different types of vegetation should be separated. Warm and cool season grasses should be fenced apart. Brome and fescue should be kept separate.

Brush, timber, or other less palatable areas should not be combined with more lush grasses and legumes. Parenthetically, I might add that frequently these rougher areas make excellent lanes to move cattle through to the better areas, thereby getting some valuable use out of otherwise wasted land.

Water quantity and availability are also vital. Cattle can graze some considerable distance from water in a pie-shaped paddock without much trouble. This is generally preferred to a lane-type of layout which could require too much walking just to drink. Lanes also can become mudholes if used frequently.

Again, this is where an "aerial" of the area is useful. Different shapes, outlines, and ideas can be drawn, changed, or abandoned much more easily than building, tearing down, and rebuilding fences.

An axiom is to use available facilities such as fences, corals, working chutes, and gates as much as possible but not become locked into them simply because they are there.

One concept that has probably not been employed to its potential is that of taking the money saved in owning and operating equipment and using it to make water available to additional paddocks.

A good deal has been written about the increased carrying capacity in terms of numbers of head possible when rotational grazing is practiced. I would not want to minimize this.

We might also look at increased carrying capacity in terms of animal grazing days or less hay and supplement fed. Often this can mean more in terms of efficiency than large numbers run on a few acres for a few days. As one begins to look at livestock production from this viewpoint, the savings realized from birth to market on each animal can be enormous.

Instead of being trucked here, there, and yonder repeatedly during its life, the average animal may move only from its place of birth to the packing plant. The savings in transportation, commission, medication, shrink, and death loss on even a few head would afford many of us a nice living.

Seems like a lot to expect from a change in attitude and some cross-fencing. As Andy Griffith used to say, "Try it. I'm here to tell you you'll like it."

By Chuck Huseman  
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What is the newest development in fencing? Plastic fence!

That's right, more and more fencing products are becoming available that are made of "plastic." The trade terms for the materials are polyethylene, polypropylene, and polyester. These plastic products, naturally, are not likely to rust, but how can plastic be strong enough to contain cattle or horses?

That very question crossed my mind when I first saw an ad for a product manufactured by "Netlon Limited" about four years ago. The product was what Netlon called its "Shelter Shading" product. This product was being used quite successfully to fence sheep. It was lightweight, easy to install, and really stood up to livestock abuse. We saw a potential for the product as a horse fence. Because of its flexibility, we thought it would be very safe around valuable horses. After obtaining a 4x100 foot roll (that weighed only 39 pounds, by the way) we found, besides all of the other claims being true, the material also had an amazing amount of tensile strength. It was strong enough to stretch with a tractor.

Since that time Netlon, which is based in the United Kingdom, has started to manufacture this and many other products in this country through The Tensar Corporation in Morrow, Ga. There are, at the present time, many other manufacturers of "plastic" fencing in this country: ATP Corporation, Athalon Products, ADPI, and KPN International, just to name a few. I will discuss the Tensar products in this article only because I have had quite a lot of exposure to many of their products.

Tensar approached the fencing market with a fervor. It adapted some of its products and developed new products to meet many of the challenges the fencing market presents. One of its adaptations was the GM product. GM in this case stands for Gabion-Mattress.

GM was developed for use around bridge abutments and shoreline areas as a soil and fill stabilizer. It is an extruded polypropylene mesh with square 2"x2" apertures so it even resembles a welded wire product. GM has much more tensile strength and durability than any rolled welded wire fabric that I've found and without the rust and corrosion problems.

The Tensar SF is very similar to the early "shelter shading" product. It has become very popular with cattlemen for use as sunshading and wind-break around feedlots. It also makes a very superior snow fence.

Another Tensar product being used by livestock people is the WB material. This is a mesh designed to be used as a ventilation siding. It is 37 percent porous, so although it will allow air to circulate, it dramatically cuts down the amount of rain and snow that can enter a building where it's being used.

Finally, a Tensar mesh that's received some press lately is the SS-1 product. This was developed as a ground reinforcement for the road building industry. Farmers and ranchers, being the eternal innovators, have found it works very well in areas where cattle congregate and form mudholes. When the SS-1 is put down and covered with stone, the stone no longer disappears in the mire.

When considering poly-type fencing products, the main thing to consider is the type of U.V. inhibitors the product contains. This is vital as the only type of deterioration affecting these products is the breakdown of the plastics by the ultra-violet rays of the sun. The most effective U.V. inhibitor is "carbon black," an ingredient used to give black color to plastics. It also shields the resins in the plastic from sunlight. So if the product you are considering is offered in a variety of colors, remember the black-colored will be the longest lasting.

On most farms there are places where a board fence is in use. Whether it's around the front pasture, where the herd bull is kept, or just around the yard, a white or black board fence can really add to the aesthetics of a farmstead. In my next article I will discuss some plastic products that have been designed to look and perform like board fences without the maintenance and, in some cases, without the high cost.