



Guest Editorial —

Look for More Than One Answer in Grazing Management

I recently read a book, "A Whack on the Side of the Head," by Roger von Oech and I'd like to share a short story from that book. The author used an example from when he was in high school and his English teacher put a small chalk dot on the blackboard. She then asked the class to tell her what "it," the dot, was.

One person responded it was a chalk dot on the blackboard and no one else in the class had any further ideas.

"I'm surprised at you," said the teacher. "I did the same exercise yesterday with a group of kindergartners and they thought of several dozen things that the dot could be: an owl's eye, a cigar butt, and so on. Their imaginations were almost without limit."

In a 10-year period, the author went on to say, between kindergarten and high school, we have lost the ability to look for more than one right answer. We have learned to be specific, losing much of our imaginative power.

What does this have to do with grazing? Lots! In the first place, it has a lot to do with the attitude I've heard expressed about the concept of controlled grazing. I guess I'm just tired of hearing from "experts" that it won't work. I'm also tired of people that give lip service to grazing, then bad mouth it when the coast is clear.

I believe a significant number of people in our livestock industry have lost the ability to look for more than one right answer. Who in the livestock industry am I referring to? University personnel, feed companies, equipment companies and farmers. If I've missed you, please feel free to write your name here _____.

Why am I so excited? Because grazing and the thought process that goes with it is the first really new idea we've had since we put the cows in the barn and tried to see how much corn we could get them to eat. Food production has always been in evolution and to try to hold it back is fruitless. Ask the people who used to make buggy whips.

I'm not saying everyone is going to grazing or should be a grazier. What I

want is recognition that grazing is an option; I want nutritionists to help farmers balance rations for cows on pasture; I want universities to look at whole farm systems, quality of life, and the livestock industry role in rural economic development; and I want farmers to welcome neighboring farmers with new and different ideas because more farmers in the neighborhood make it better for all of agriculture.

I realize that new ideas, of which many aren't all that good, are always popping up and the livestock industry basically needs to stay with the tried and true. But grazing is no longer a new idea.

At this year's Wisconsin grazing conference a sellout crowd of 450 people (400 plus were real farmers) heard other farmers tell how grazing is working on their operations. The Indiana Sustainable Ag group this year spent most of their budget and time at this year's annual meeting on grazing. Ohio has a grazing conference this year and Michigan's two-day conference looks like it may be a sellout.

This explosion of interest is different than the blue tube experience because it's farmer driven. Grazing is here to stay unless beef prices go way up and tractors and fuel go down. I want people to recognize the valuable role a grazing-based livestock industry can play.

Diversity is healthy, just ask businesses in dairy counties in Wisconsin that had 70 percent alfalfa winter kill. When farmers are financially hurt in an area, the rest of the infrastructure suffers too.

A grazing farm takes less capital to start and offers more opportunity for entry level producers. Livestock are a value-added industry that puts more dollars per acre in producers' pockets. If you don't think grazing will work for you, I respect your opinion. But grazing will be a bigger part of the future of Midwest livestock agriculture. We pro-graziers could really use your help to make it an even better alternative livestock production system.

I also have a whack on the side of the head for the pro-graziers who smugly read the first part of this article. Grazing is an exciting idea that is catching on like wildfire but it's not about cows eating grass.

The grazing I'm referring to is more accurately described as Holistic Resource Management. It's really hard to relate to a \$10 phrase like Holistic Resource Management so most people say grazing. But grazing is really a different way to mix and match resources to meet human goals.

Traditional agriculture has been obsessed with doing it "right" —producing more and if it's not working, just work harder.

My whack for people starting to put cows on grass is there is no cookbook for grazing. Yes, there's some basic guidelines on grazing cows but the real driving force is your goals. Why are you farming? What do you want to get out of it? What do you want to be doing in 10 years? These are the real driving forces in designing grazing systems. As soon as we get a right way, the system is driving us instead of us driving the system.

Hopefully, I've given everyone a fair and equal whack. Agriculture is going through some serious structural changes. But these changes are not unique to agriculture, just ask the people at GM, or IBM, or the local garage that used to pump gas, or the local hardware or grocery store. Only working harder leads to frustration and failure. We need new ways to produce livestock profitability, in a lifestyle we want our children to have, and in a system that makes us a good neighbor with the world around us.

Grazing gives us an alternative. Change is inevitable. Do you want to be its victim or its architect?

Ben Bartlett
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Tallow-treated Bales Fed to Cows In New Study at North Missouri Center

If the proof is in the eating, tallow-coated hay bales will be put to the test at the University of Missouri North Missouri Center near Spickard.

Dale Watson, who is perfecting a beef fat coating that prevents spoilage in big hay bales, will conduct a feeding test of the hay this year. He will feed treated bales to 90 cows in the University beef herd.

Watson, a commercial agriculture Extension specialist, will compare different bale treatments in the study to be run early next winter. Hay baled this summer will be prepared three ways. Part of the bales will receive no treatment, while the rest receive two different treatments of hydrogenated tallow.

In earlier studies, Watson showed that melted beef tallow flowed onto the bales forms a protective coating that sheds rain. When water is kept from entering the bale, spoilage is almost eliminated.

Earlier feeding tests have shown that the tallow is eaten by the cows, adding energy to their winter ration. The new test will determine the difference in feeding value of the treated hay.

The new research is funded by a \$31,046 grant from the Fats and Protein Research Foundation, Ft. Myers Beach, Fla.

Watson has dubbed the process, "the environmentally friendly bale cover." He continues to experiment with different blends of tallow to determine the best solidification points for the melted tallow. The tallow coating could replace plastic wrappers now used by some farmers to protect their hay. Watson says the tallow should be less expensive than the plastic wrappers. Tallow is a beef fat by-product, now in surplus supply. Raw beef tallow will not work, however, unless it is hydrogenated.

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