

GRASS FARMERS' *Favorites*

*Good cattle and good grass
make great companions.*

A Missouri cattleman named Bob Morrison made this observation a few years ago and had made it a motto for his farming operation.

As an Angus breeder you now if you don't carefully plan and carry out each phase of your breeding program, profits can turn into losses. The same holds true for a forage program.

Well managed range or pastureland is not only important for your financial statement, it's a valuable natural resource. It supports beef cattle and the entire beef industry. It protects our soil from wind and water erosion, and provides habitat for many species of wildlife. It enhances our environment by cleansing the air, filtering runoff to streams, increasing intake or precipitation, and aiding the recharge of groundwater.

A number of Angus producers across the country follow Morrison's philosophy, including Dave Duncan of High Valley Ranch, Ellensburg Wash. "We call ourselves ranchers or cattle breeders, but we're really grass farmers. We convert solar energy to grass and use cattle to harvest this natural resource and convert it to dollars which provide a living for our families and dollars to re-invest into our stewardship of the land and the cattle," Duncan says.

We ask Duncan and several other "grass farmers" across the country to name their favorite forages and explain their importance to their Angus breeding operations. Here's their thoughtful answers:

— Jerilyn Johnson

Dave Duncan, High Valley Ranch Ellensburg, Washington

Top pick: Tall fescue, native grasses and clovers

Duncan uses a 50/50 grass and legume mixture to create a plant community on his central Washington ranch. Forages are selected for their long-term adaptability, productivity and nutritional value.

High Valley Ranch is located in a river valley with semi-arid conditions. In this type of environment a producer needs both early and late season grasses, Duncan says. Legumes are desired for hot, summer days. A diversity of plant types is needed to adapt to variable soil types, both shallow and deep, with diverse moisture retaining qualities.

Duncan follows a planned grazing system with multiple paddocks and electric fencing. He has found it best to optimize production, not maximize pounds of gain per acre. Planned grazing has increased forage production, extended the grazing season to eight to nine months, and reduced overall production costs at High Valley Ranch.

Some forage is stockpiled for winter grazing. No forage goes into hay production Duncan believes in letting his cows harvest the forage, not machinery. No commercial fertilizer or pesticide are used. This has reduced production costs and enhanced the environment, Duncan says.

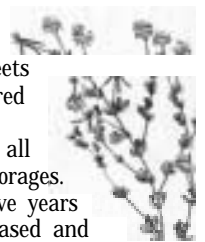


Harry Sheets, Suburban Angus Farm Eagleville, Missouri

Top pick: Birdsfoot trefoil and Kentucky bluegrass

This summer legume and cool-season grass combination works well for Sheets rotational grazing system and for his registered Angus breeding operation. Nutritional value, productivity and conservation capabilities are all important reasons why Sheets favors these forages.

Since establishing the birdsfoot trefoil five years ago, Sheets' calf weaning weights have increased and fertilizer application costs have been reduced, resulting in extra income for this northwestern Missouri Angus breeder.



With rotational grazing and stockpiling of these forages, he's been able to extend his cow herd's grazing season to eight to nine months.

Bluegrass has proven to be a productive forage over the years for Sheets' Suburban Angus Farm. His pastures originally had smooth brome grass, a native to this region as well as introduced alfalfa and tall fescue. But Sheets found alfalfa's maintenance costs too high and couldn't tolerate fescue's endophyte problems in his cattle breeding program.

A 30-acre field of brome grass/alfalfa is maintained for hay production. Sheets will establish birdsfoot trefoil and overs in this field in the near future, once the alfalfa stand thins out.

Sheets has been recognized for his forage management efforts. He was named Master Conservationist by the Harrison County, Mo., Soil & Water Conservation District, and was nominated for *Angus Journal's* 1994 Land Stewardship Central Region Award.

Tom Perrier, Dalebanks Angus Eureka, Kansas

Top pick: Big and little bluestems

Native prairie grasses, such as the bluestems, switchgrass, sideoats grama and Indiangrass, are well adapted to Perrier's ranch located at the southern edge of the Kansas Flint Hills. They produce excellent summer grazing and are fairly drought resistant. Most of the land in this area is not suitable for cultivation.

"Native grass pastures are reliable year in and year out," Perrier says. "A plus to that is our weaning weights are consistent from pasture to pasture in the same season. This improves the reliability of our records program. All cattle raised together must be given the same environment and nutrition."

Perrier admits there are some shortcomings to bluestem pastures. The biggest problem is their short (six months maximum) grazing season. They provide high quality forage in May and June, but only fair nutritional value August through October, and are rated poor for winter grazing. To extend his grazing season and balance out his forage program, Perrier is increasing acres of wheat pasture, brome grass and alfalfa for his cattle grazing and hay production programs.

Ralph Neill, Douglas Center Stock Farm Corning, Iowa

Top pick: Smooth brome grass, reed canary grass and switchgrass

A mixture of cool-season and warm-season grasses, plus a nitrogen-fixing legume are all ingredients necessary for this southwestern Iowa cattleman's successful forage program.

Neill was a fan of brome grass/alfalfa pastures, but had to give up the alfalfa when musk thistle seeds started "blowin' in the wind" from nearby Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres. He now sprays 2,4D and nitrogen on straight brome grass to take care weed 'n feed.

"If we only had one grass to use, it would be brome grass. Its nutritional value, productivity and conservation qualities make it our top choice. It's especially good for our steep hills," says Neill, a 1993 regional winner in the National Cattlemen's Association Environmental Stewardship Award program.

This grass farmer prefers reed canary grass, also a cool-season forage, for his farm's waterways and wet areas. Rotational grazing and clipping keeps it short and more palatable for cattle.

He established switchgrass nine years ago for summer grazing and early spring calving pasture. "We like to let it grow tall in the summer and then graze it," Neill explains. "By leaving plenty of tall plants, it acts as a nice windbreak for our new calves on cold, windy days. What the cows tramp down the summer before serves as a nice mat for the newborn calves."



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RECOMMENDED READING

Holistic Resource Management

Author: Allan Savory

Publisher: Island Press

\$24.95 softbound, \$39.95 hardbound, plus \$2 shipping

Southern Forages

Authors: D. Ball, C. Hoveland and G. Lacefield

Cost: \$20

Send order to:

Circulation Dept.

Potash & Phosphate Institute

655 Engineering Drive, Suite 110

Norcross, GA 30092-2821

Nebraska Range & Pasture Grasses

Authors: J. Stubbendieck, J. Nichols and K. Roberts

University of Nebraska-Lincoln

(402) 472-6237

Extension Publication E.C. 85-170-F

Forages (Third Edition)

Author: M. Heath, Purdue University; D. Metcalfe, University of Arizona; and R. Barnes, USDA Agricultural Research Service.

Publisher: Iowa State University Press, Ames, Iowa

How to Plan, Implement & Practice Controlled Grazing on Your Place

Author: Bob Kingsbery

Cost: \$12.95 per copy, plus \$1.50 shipping.

Order from: Kingsbery Communications

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