



Locating a Home Away from Home

When pasture resources are short, finding forage resources where growing conditions are better may offer an alternative to selling cows.

by T.S. Gatz

When a drought lingers on, or a drought has ended but pastures simply won't meet the current needs of the cattle, cattlemen are often faced with trying to relocate animals outside of the drought area.

Dale Blasi, Extension beef specialist and professor at Kansas State University, says when searching for options, four places to visit first would be the local county extension office, the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS) office, your state Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office and area coffee shops.

"Your local county extension office is often aware of people who are retiring or scaling back," Blasi states. "NRCS can usually tell you if grass is available and if leases are available in non-drought areas.

"You should also never underestimate what you can learn from a local coffee shop, as well as other places where business and livestock are transacted. You simply have to keep your ears open."

Blasi underpins that finding grass when grass is tight is typically, "not what you know, it's who you know" that makes the difference. That's where years of networking can pay off.

"When relocating your cows and calves, you want to deal with people you trust," he elaborates. "It's one thing to create a lease with a person you know. It's another thing to work with a person you don't know, and greater risk is involved when you're working with a person you don't know who lives in another state."

If you've found a pasture out of state, ag business specialists recommend that you save yourself time and money by getting an aerial map of the property from the landowner or locate the tract on Google Maps or the NRCS Web Soil Survey. This will allow you to check for any ponds, creeks and existing water structures on the property. Plus, you can check for shade and shelter, as well as dips and valleys in the pasture where livestock can be protected from the elements.

Once you're satisfied that the pasture in which you are interested could be the one, then you might be time and money ahead

to check it out and meet the landowner face to face.

Relocation checklist

Rick Rasby, Extension beef specialist and professor, University of Nebraska–Lincoln, suggests producers go through a checklist when relocating the cow herd. Items on his checklist that should be posed to landowners include:

- ▶ Who is responsible for checking the cattle?
- ▶ Who is responsible for checking on the water?
- ▶ Who is responsible for checking the mineral and salt?
- ▶ Who is responsible for checking and repairing fences?
- ▶ Who is responsible for doctoring sick cattle?
- ▶ What are the restrictions, animal identification or health information needed if cattle are transported across state lines?

Other questions that require answers include:

- ▶ Will cattle be commingled with another group?
- ▶ What is the condition of the grass?
- ▶ How will pastures be maintained?

"Sometimes producers are in a hurry and don't have these items in line before relocating the cattle," Rasby states.

Rasby and Blasi agree producers should know something about the area where the cattle are being relocated. They underscore the importance of a lessee knowing the type of grass in the pasture being leased. After all, moving cattle into different areas of the country can present different challenges.

For example, relocating to a state such as Missouri, where a primary grass in pastures is fescue, may pose challenges for a cow herd. If the fescue is endophyte-infested and cows graze it at certain times of the year, the

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endophyte can have a negative impact on reproduction if you don't know how to manage grazing during that time period. Thus, knowing this type of information may help determine if the cows should be relocated before or after the breeding season.

If you've searched and can't find grass nearby and don't want to relocate animals to another state, there is another option.

"Of course, another location to relocate cows for spring and summer is feedlots," Rasby interjects. "Then again, hammer

out the details before relocating them. It is a challenge for feedlot managers not to try to 'fatten' the cows."

Whether cattle are being relocated to pastures or a feedlot, a written contract between the involved parties can ease the worry load and help prevent potential disagreements.

Blasi notes that most problems with a pasture lease occur when one or more



parties don't fully understand what the other expected. He says it's better to sit down, have an open and transparent discussion and hammer out the lease details. Every detail from rental rates to right to

enter the property to stocking rate should be determined and a contract signed and dated by both parties before any animals are unloaded off the trailer.

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Editor's Note: T.S. Gatz is a freelancer from Windsor, Colo. She has been writing about the beef industry for more than 40 years.