Bull Session 1-31-22 Winter Grazing

[00:00:00]

**Holly Stoltz:** Welcome everybody to our January bull session. And we have three producers from different parts of the state that I thought would be really interesting how they winter graze and then their different climates.

And so we have Brian Mannix from Helmville and Cooper Hibbard from cascade and Todd Barkley from baker. So I will let them introduce themselves. But Brian, if you want to start, and I'm going to kind of how you guys have been doing your winter, grazing, how you started into it. Successes failures,

**Bryan Mannix:** yeah. So I'm Brian Mannix. I'm the fifth generation back home now working with my dad and two uncles. And I think there's five of my generation back working on the ranch right now. And I'd say that first off we feed a lot of, we feedhay most of the winter still, [00:01:00] but our winter grazing journey it started before I was home.

And that kind of started out, consisted of like stockpiling some Meadows and we have some swamp ground that you can't get to until it freezes a lot of sedges that the cows won't graze until you get. Snow and some colder temperatures. So they kind of started doing that and trying to push the limits there.

And they killed a few cows trying to figure out where those limits and lines were at and how far you could go. So it definitely hasn't always been pretty. So they were kind of doing that. And then we started bale grazing some animals, I don't know, like four or five years ago andkind of been using that as a tool, kind of in certain areas where we feel like the soil could use some more ground cover or heavy nutrient loads or using it in certain scenarios just for a time management purposes.

But it's more of a strategic tool and not like a general [00:02:00] practice we use everywhere. And then our latest one that we've been doing in swath grazing. Just wrapped up our third, third year doing that. And David kind of was talking with him when I was friends out of Colorado. And so we decided to start trying it and it's been going very well for us.

We were wanted to do more acres, but with the hay prices this year we would have had a weather event that we couldn't get to those acres. It would have been pretty big deal. So what we ended up doing was about 68 acres of swath grazing this year. And we did it with our replacement heifers, and this was the first time of the three years that we didn't supplement anything.

Cause we were too chicken to not supplement them before, even though we were testing the hay. But I'll throw some numbers at you real quick for, so these are 2020 numbers of this field in this field is. Really Subi [00:03:00] and it's a very wet, so it's hard to graze like regrowth in the fall, you can kind of like barely get in there to hay.

It, you can just get it dried out enough to hay. And then the water table raises a lot. So it's kind of hard to manage for like that sod management. And he used to be picky and we will look, Randy did some discing, but he didn't like, turn the soil over. He just cut the tops off of those big humps and then rolled it.

And now is before that you couldn't hardly walk out there. So that's kinda like why we're trying this and that areas. Cause it's a hard piece to manage with a traditional haying or grazing practices just because it's so subby out there. So in 2020, the hay bales that we took off of that same field at like 7.9%.

Protein in the dry matter and, oh, sorry. Seven points, 7.6 protein [00:04:00] and 59.8 TDN and the swathes had 7.9% protein and 58.5 TDN. So you really didn't, we didn't lose much on it and we cut it a little later. So typically with that piece would get hayed, like mid July and we cut it about the 10th or 12th of August, and then just it the same day that we cut it and then just left it in that first year.

It got rained on a lot, and we were pretty nervous about how the quality would turn out, but it turned out pretty well. And then this year I tried to put some value on it, of it. You know, if you would, have hayed and baled that same acre. What would that, what would that look like? So this is just accounting for the back end, not the front end of like baling it, hauling it, feeding it back out and stuff like that.

This is just what it would cost me to feed those animals with a tractor, you know, in a spinner [00:05:00] unrolling hay or moving poly wire. So if the same 68 acres, we would've got about 40 days of feed and with the swath grazing, I had about 36 days of feed. And it cost me about $8 and 33 cents a day to move poly wire.

And it would cost me about $112 a day to use a tractor to feed them. So there's some significant value there. They don't get all of the swath for sure. And it does set back the. The grass a little bit in the spring, you can see where those old rows were. And there's some swales where like the swaths got completely iced over.

But other than that, they clean it up pretty darn well, and they did well on it. I was pretty surprised at how well those heifers did on it this year. I was looking at them when they're going in. And I thought they're like a body condition score of like five and a [00:06:00] half. And I actually think they gained about a half body condition score coming out.

And even if I was wrong about that and was getting fooled by their hair coat, they didn't lose weight and they didn't get supplemented. And it was a lot cheaper to swath graze them. One thing that I learned from Cooper with him and his winter grazing program was if you see a storm coming, being on the front end, so.

Two years ago, we had some pretty big Northeast are coming and pulled the cows out and bale graze them for like three or four days to let that storm pass. So some of those mistakes, those able to try to avoid just by learning from other people, doing that, because the area that they're in is really prone to high wind not a lot of cover.

So if there is going to be a big storm, we have to find some brush for them and then feed them. So it's, you're constantly watching the weather like you, most people are anyway. But one of the [00:07:00] biggest benefits for us, like why swath graze versus just stock pile it is we get quiet, you know, not like crazy amount of snow that they can't graze through, but we get crust.

We get heavy crust layers and not just like a crust layer, but it'll actually be like an ice shelf. So we had to leave. Probably 80 acres of stockpiled forage this year that we couldn't get to when the weather turned on us. And it's, you don't know if that's going to happen in December or if it will happen in February.

Like last year, we were able to graze some of our stockpile all the way through January, and then those cows went onto those swathes till middle of March This year, where winter showed up in December and things got crusty and started getting a little ice shelf on that. No, the grasses that are out there just like a lot of wild Timothy and Fox tail stuff like that, that doesn't stand up very good through the snow.

It just lays over. So it creates a really [00:08:00] tough condition in those swaths. They'll break that crust layer walking over it, and the ones behind them will just start to find those swaths. And they'll just walk right down and flip those swaths over with. their noses, it was, this is pretty fun to watch. I mean, I watched them graze through like a three-foot drift getting into it, like there all the way up to their ears, it was covering the snow, sticking out and pulling out grass.

So that crust really isn't as big of a factor with those swaths. And I actually kinda think they might create a little bit of heat. Cause last year I was walking across, putting out some polywire and anywhere there wasn't a windrow, I was walking on top of the snow. And anywhere that there was a windrow I would fall through.

So that cross layer was a lot thinner, wherever those swaths were. But the bottom of it will freeze. And so you lose some of that forage to that. For sure. So there's some downsides there and setting it back in the spring, but for us has been a great way for us to reduce that.[00:09:00] How much we spend getting those through those, some of these tougher months colder weather.

I guess the only other things I add it was I was doing them on three-day grazes this year. Last year I had out them on two day grazes. And a couple of the other benefits that I've seen that like, you'll hear people talk about with bale grazing is how they act. On a day-to-day basis. Both this year and last year I was feeding a different group right next to them.

And the ones that were on the swath grades didn't even lift up their head at all. They're just kept going and, and grazing. So there were way less antsy they're full lot. And I was just doing the three days for time management this year, but I think you could get them to clean up more of the swath on like a daily move or a two day move than a three-day move to just like grazing other things too.

**Holly Stoltz:** Todd, do you want to go ahead and explain your winter grazing strategy and where are you from?

**Todd Barkley:** All right. So I'm [00:10:00] Todd Berkley. We farm and ranch in Eastern Montana south of baker, Southwest a baker. And we do a combination, I guess, of, of winter grazing in amongst our, our cropland. We have stockpiled hay or grass it's generally in Woody draws, waterways fences, and we put up about 800 acres.

Roundup ready, alfalfa straight alfalfa. And about the same grass alfalfa hay mix. So we'll start supplementing our alfalfa to our cattle, the middle October. And we'll, we'll do a 72 hour thing at about five pounds a day. So we'll feed 15 pounds every third day. And that'll get us to weaning, which is about the middle of December.

And by feeding early like that on the cow, we can get our calves sort of used to how they're going to do on their weaning because [00:11:00] we will, our herd is mostly a forage based herd all the time, even though we do farm the farming side of it is, is a commodity sale. So, so we'll do that after we wean the cows, basically winter graze until Christmas time.

And at that point. They'll go into our winter pastures into a lot of the stubble aftermath, and we'll start our we'll start our protocols, which a lot of times we'll start out with just that five or seven pounds of alfalfa, depending on the temperature that day or on that every third day feeding. And we'll gradually work into when they start getting some of the cream off of the winter graze, we'll start adding some supplement grass, alfalfa mix, or, or a millet hay or a sorghum hay depending on, depending on where we're at.

We try not to ever feed a tame grass, perennial grass on native ground. We, we, if, if we're going to do that, we'll use our [00:12:00] sprayed Roundup ready alfalfa on the native or some annual. Immature wheat hay, I mean, we'd like to try to put our, our wheat or grain hay up in the milk stage or the millet.

So some of the things we'll do is this year, we're having to feed a full feed on our younger cows. We wean our replacement half or yearlings off for about four or five days, and then we'll actually take them to a group of cows that have been, that had steer calves on them for S for instance. So they'd been weaned off and dried up and our heifer calves go right into that cow herd, or they'll go in with our first calf heifers and younger cows, something that needs a growing ration, but they get treated the same as our cows.

And and we'll feed clear through the middle of may. And the closer we get to calving the higher percentage of, of feed, we gotta feed them. There'll be up to a hundred percent. [00:13:00] hay, by the time we're calving. And when we do that, we still feed the every seven days. And it's our poor quality hay. We keep all of our good hay through the winter and our poor quality hay grass, alfalfa mix, two three-year-old hay comes at calving time.

We don't want our cows over milking and we're rolling those bales out instead of bale grazing because we don't want some of them, hour glass bales to tip over on baby calves. And yeah, so we're up to the two and a half percent body weight. And then by the 15th of May, you know, they're pretty much out on, out on, on grass.

Some of the things we that I'm interested in is, is recycling the carbon. And so we have a lot of gumbo, hard pan in our area. And so when we're doing bale grazing out on that native ground we're using either straight alfalfa or the millet or the immature grain hay, and we're bale grazing on those spots, trying to create that microclimate to [00:14:00] stimulate the Latin seed bank that's that's there.

And and getting those bare spots to, to, to start cycling carbon. And we've had some just amazing results in one year. So we have shale outcroppings. We do that on the shale outcroppings too. We do do some strip grazing. We got some pictures. Holly will maybe show through the examples. We do do some strip grazing.

Also. We don't, we don't do the electric fence on the strip graze. There's, there's a spot. Where were we? We were bale grazing on some, on some gumbo. That's actually on my son's piece of property, those were 70 bales of alfalfa and Clover new seeding that had two and a half inches of rain on it. And so we actually had 250 cows in that pasture on that particular amount of bales for about a month.

And as you can see, there's pretty good grass around too. So I mean, they work on those bales and then, then, then eat [00:15:00] grass for sure. But but yeah, and it was dry last year, so we didn't get the results that we have had in the past. But Holly, do you have some, that's my yearling heifers strip grazing and that's more them.

So there's a spot on hard pan gumbo. If you look in the forefront of that picture, you'll see where we didn't get our bale grazing, but that strip, that runs through that hard pan. That's just in one year. I think if you go to another slide, another picture, Holly. Okay. There again, we haven't, haven't really addressed that, that on the front end, but on the back end we have, is there a picture?

Yeah, there we go. So that was that was this spring. I, I bailed grazed there that's bale grazing. tooThat's not me rolling bales out. So it's like, it's like everything, it's a technique. All of our winter feeding is a technique and, and, and you can get good at it, but it is a technique. So it takes some trial and error [00:16:00] and some doing things.

And as you can see in that picture, there is not a lot of quote unquote waste. And what is there is creating a microclimate and that hard pan gumbo to stimulate the Latin seed bank. Almost everything that's coming up in there is seeds that have come in through either the jet stream or wind or cattle or livestock because straight alfalfa, Roundup ready, no weeds coming in, or immature grain hay that doesn't have weeds.

So, yeah, so, so we're pretty excited about that in our winter program. There's some, just some stockers bale grazing out on some pasture. The ones on the back are eating the, eating, the bales that I put out the, that last picture was some yearlings that were on probably on something I'd done three weeks ago.

And I was talking to my son about this, cause he's, he's having an extra amount of wait, but this is all part of the technique, but these cattle, well. Come back to these sites. And as long as we've been doing [00:17:00] it, it seems like three weeks is, is the, is the key. They'll come back and revisit those spots that they've stepped in and messed in and, and all that other stuff.

But a couple of things, I guess we really pay attention to is the nutrients requirements of the cow. We don't like to overfeed, but they do need their, their daily allowance of protein proteins. The one we, we focus on the most, we've had a couple issues with, with vitamin a and the spring, and this is going to be another one of those years.

So if out of any of this, what I can just stress and not stress enough is if you're not calving with nature, which we're not, I mean, we have the middle of April, not the middle of may. There's not going to be enough, vitamin a and a lot of this hay that we're feeding this year. And a lot of this grain hay that we're feeding, even though there's not enough nitrates to create problems, nitrates, Ty vitamin a up grain hay has no vitamin a.

So, so please, cause [00:18:00] we've had two big wrecks with vitamin a once was feeding two and three-year-old hay and once was feeding really, really green, grain hay. And if cost us pretty dearly. But but anyways with that, I guess we don't do the electric fencing in the winter time, but I just want to give you an example of, of how you, because they talk about mob grazing and every time I feed a bale of hay, I go out there.

Yes, meeting the nutrient requirements, my cow, but I also want to have a secondary deal of what can I do to benefit my ground with this bale of hay. And so if you, if you go to some of these mob grazing workshops and they're talking this million pounds of cows per acre and stuff, when we put out our alfalfa every third day, we roll it out because we cannot bale graze.

We cannot set that few bales out with the number of cows and everybody get their five pounds [00:19:00] a day or their 15 pounds. So when I take the two bales out or three bales out I'll find that hot spot, or I'll find a spot next to some hardpan gumbo or whatever I want to treat, and I'll roll that bale out and say, I roll it out for 200 feet.

And that's two cows eating side by side is 24 feet. So that's a rod and a half and say, I get 200 feet rolled out, right? So that's 4,800 square feet and the acres 42,000 square feet. So that's basically one 8.8 of an acre. And if I did my math, right, which I hope I did, if there was 150 cows on that 200 foot of alfalfa hay, that's basically 180,000 pounds.

If they're 1200 pound cows times the 8.8. So I got 1 million, 584,000 pounds per acre on that 200 foot. And they're going only going to be on there 20 minutes, which that's about all you want [00:20:00] on, if you have that kind of stocking rate. So you can address that hotspot without any electric fence or anything just by rolling out some, some alfalfa or something.

Out on some, some hotspots or some issues you want to address. So, so that's how we sorta take our winter feeding. You know, I guess soil health is the big but big buzzword now. And we've been doing it for 20 years and we're only in a 10 inch rainfall area and they usually come in three or four huge events and the more we can stimulate the water holding capacity of our soils, the better off we are.

So and if you have any questions, feel free to call. But I guess that's all I have for now.

**Holly Stoltz:** Thank you, Todd. We appreciate it. Cooper. Do you want to go next?

**Cooper Hibbard:** Well, good evening everybody. My name is Cooper Hibbard. I'm excited to be visiting with you all tonight. I wasn't nervous until I see that my brothers on the call and all of a [00:21:00] sudden I got really nervous, so it must be as intimidating facial hair or something.

So if I seem nervous, it's definitely Terrell's fault. But so like Brian, we're also a fifth generation family ranch, my brother and myself being part of the fifth generation. And we're located outside of cascade Montana and fairly mountainous environment. It's, it's tough for us to put up a lot of.

We don't, we range from about 43,000 to about 7,800 feet in elevation. And so the ranch has about, has three different zones. We have our winter zone and our, what we call our shoulder zone or a transition zone. And then our summer grazing zone, our summer country and or winter zone and our ability to produce hay is definitely the bottleneck for us and what drives and dictates what our stocking rate is.

And we were historically, you know, doing, it was just a conventional ranch. We running cattle and sheep and we're calving in February [00:22:00] and March. And because of that setup where winter grazing zone or winter zone was the true bottleneck, it just kind of felt like we were trying to. Put a square peg in a round hole.

It just didn't work. And so 20 years ago we changed our, our calving date to what ended up being June, June 1st spend June 10th. We just changed it to June, June 1st. And that allowed us to, by doing that, we matched our cows production cycle with the grass cycle. And we did that in hopes of getting away from feeding hay and having to really be dictated by the area of our, our winter zone of how many cows we could run a year round.

And by doing that, we started winter grazing. So we started winter grazing 20 years ago because our cows were in their second and third trimester throughout the winter. And so I came, I came back home about nine years ago. And so 20 years ago, when we winter graze they're [00:23:00] on about seven day moves. And then when I came home, we were on about four and a half day moves on an , average move.

And we're currently on one day moves. And so in that progression from four and a half day moves, since I came home to currently being one day moves, we've increased our productivity and harvest efficiency and that winter zone by 200%. So what that means is that winter zone which was the bottleneck for our productivity as a ranch for how many cows we could run.

We just got handed two more winter zones just by changing our grazing management. Well, it's not as simple as that first we changed our production cycle and then we changed our grazing management, but what we've, what we've learned through that process and through that progression was just as a series of mistakes and a lot of trial and error to see what works for this place and in this environment and our resources, our workforce, and just kind of how the logistics of everything work and fall together here.

I think those principles still apply. Even if you are calving in April[00:24:00] or March and what we've learned through those principles or how we've gotten to that increase the average increase of 200% as, and those one day, one day moves.

We're, I'm a big believer in non-selective grazing when possible. And the beauty of non-selective grazing is every single plants affected. And when every plant's affected, it's either grazed or trampled when every plant's affected, it's put on a level playing field. And in that scenario, the plants that succeed and when the plants you're setting up for success are the plants with the deepest root systems and the most amount of leaf area.

And those more often than not are your desirable species. And so not only are you selecting for your desirable species through that grazing event, you're also increasing your grazing efficiency because you're grazing, you're effecting every plant, right? Your, your cows are eating more plants than they would otherwise.

And you're [00:25:00] also a by-product of non-selective grazing is litter. So you're laying down more litter, you're covering more soil. So you're, you're building soil. You're capturing more. water. You're extending your growing season because you're cooling your soil, temperatures. And all of that leads to this 200% increase on average.

And that 200% increase happened in five years. And some, those five years were some of the driest years that this ranch has ever seen. And there's a real kind of stigma with that type of grazing that it's really pretty difficult with animal performance and it is, but the understanding is it's kind of this, this real tension between whatever gains you get an ecological benefits you have to give up in animal performance.

I think that there's a way to break through that and it seems like we have broken through that and there's, this is where it gets really pretty technical. And where these [00:26:00] principles are really important. I think that we've at least got helped guide our day and we've come by these honestly through a series of very expensive mistakes.

But if we make a point of moving our cows on these one day moves, we move our cows when they're full and what happens when you move them, when they're full, it seems like you can affect, you know, with that mod grazing and, and there's that real competitive mob mentality type behavior that these cattle get where they're just this real frenzy, you know, and that can, I've seen that.

And. And it's really frustrating. And all of a sudden, you're not in control anymore, and your cows are angry and I'm not happy and stressed out. And who knows what that stress that compiling stress does to their performance. And that certainly happens and starts to build. If you show up and you move them, when they already know that it's time to be moved and they're waiting for you.

And so we started moving them when they're [00:27:00] full and that same competitive mindset that these cows had

ended up forcing them. We're basically, force-feeding them. It's forcing them to eat when they otherwise wouldn't because they want to get that piece of grass before that other cow does. And for those of you who are familiar with Johan, Seitzman one of his big selection, genetic selection criteria is high relative intake

which is a more feed that a cow can eat in relation to her body size is one of the largest indicators for whether or not she's be in good condition in respect to her peer. Right? Well, I think that you can do that with your management as well. You can influence their relative intake. You can make them eat more for their individual body size and they otherwise would by moving them when they're full.

And you utilizing that mob competitive mentality as a tool in your favor. And by doing that this last year, so we start winter grazing around December 15th, there'll be on [00:28:00] daily moves and we'll have them on daily moves until about May 15th. And so from December until. It was late April Rick Caquelin who's on the call has been working with us for the last 11 years.

And Rick came in December and he came in may and in December, our cows are a body condition five and throughout the winter, they didn't see any supplement. We fed them 200 pounds per cow to get them through the polar vortex and just mineral. And they're on these daily moves. And by late April, their body condition five and three quarters.

So we gained three quarters of body conditioner, 75 pounds throughout the course of the winter, without any supplement and 200 pounds of hay. Keep in mind though that these girls were in their second and third trimester. So it's a different, it's a different ball game. But with that type of focus on our day with.

Really paying attention to animal behavior, getting [00:29:00] our, eye dialed in to the grazes and when they're full and when it was time to move them after walking that line between we've grazed this as effectively as we see fit and they're still full and ruminating, let's move them. Dave, who is in charge of this area of the ranch, he's just really got that dialed in this last year.

And that's been kind of the little secret that we've been waiting to find for two decades. And Brian also mentioned that it took me years to figure this out because it's like, once you get sucked into this winter grazing mindset, you really kind of con. You get to be pretty conservative with your resources.

You just don't go out feeding hay, Willy nilly, because you can see what you can do. And so I was of the mindset when these storms would hit where it's like, oh, let's just wait and see, let's wait and see how bad it is. And let's wait and see if we actually need to feed them. And so we made a point of, well, I really messed up many times by doing that.

That was, that was not the right move. And it was [00:30:00] really expensive and costs us in body condition that we were not able to gain back throughout the rest of the winter. And so we started feeding on the front end of storms. So like feeding half ration even a day before the storm hits and just keeping that furnace going.

And that's, that's been a big change. It's helped us conserve body condition because I'm really of the philosophy that everything, when you, when you boil it all down, everything fertility. Calf health cow longevity, the efficiency of your ability to use your resources and ability to graze as efficient

is it efficiently as you think you need to graze and supplementing, supplementing as least as you think you need to supplement it all comes down to body condition. So how you can conserve build up body condition when mother nature provides it and conserve it for the rest of the year is that's in my current thinking anyways.

That's what it all comes down to. So

I think I'll, I think I'll end it there. [00:31:00] Well, the other thing I would say is, you know, in the progression of the four and a half day, graze periods to the one day graze periods that was just trial and error. And, you know, we're going out and checking these cows typically every day anyways. And so spending an hour to do polywire work while we're out, there actually seems like less, it's less work than a three-day graze and certainly better for the cows than a two day graze.

Because the power of seeing fresh feed every day is really does wonders. I think, for these girls, especially when they're moved, when they're full. And so it's, it's kind of these one day moves for us in our environment is just a win-win-win across the board. I think, I think that's about sums it up for me.

**Holly Stoltz:** Thank you Cooper. Tricia has a question. Do you want to ask that Trisha or do you want me to, just to ask it for you?

**Tricia Kimmel:** That was actually PJ so I'll let him ask. One to know there from Brian, you know, when you swath that hay down in the fall or whatever you said [00:32:00] August or September between then, and when the cows graze, did you ever have any trouble with the wind blowing your windrows away?

**Bryan Mannix:** I did have one like little cyclone go through and messed up a few windrows kind of pissed me off, but overall not too much. Cause I think, you know, it's, you're raking it when it's green. So it's a, it's a lot heavier than what you would typically think of a window looking like it's pretty heavy.

But I have seen, seen one time I had a little cyclone go through and you know, it, wasn't very big area, but messed a few of 'em up.

**Holly Stoltz:** Todd, can you add to that beings that you're kind of on the plains, right? Does the wind have wreak havoc on yours?

**Todd Barkley:** . So really important when you swath that to, to rake it. You know, down where we're at the swath grazing that you see my heifers grazing on. There was probably a ton a ton to, the quarter to the acre hay, which is, you know, pretty good for us. And [00:33:00] that was a big hay year. And, and I was just tired of, of doing bales.

And I thought this'll be perfect. It's in a winter pasture where I, a lot of times I'll kick my yearling heifers and bred heifers and maybe some short-term cows, because I truly am a believer that cows are your cheapest hired hands. And when it comes to taking care of heifer calves, I keep adult supervision.

But anyways, so yeah, it's really important to rake that when it's wet, when it's heavy, you'll rake it together and it'll settle down and form a nice, a nice wind shielding windrow. And we have. We have 50, 60 mile an hour winds in the wide open. And, and, and on that particular year, there was 180 acres.

I think we did that year and we had no problem whatsoever with the wind. So, and that was July. And that was year before last. And that particular hay had probably 18 inches of rain from the middle of [00:34:00] July to the end of September. I don't know, Rick, you can remember that you guys came down for a tour on the Creek, on our Burdoch, but we had rain, rain, rain, rain, rain, rain, rain that year.

And you know, that sort of settled those windows down a little bit and they look off we black, but the heifers thought they were candy. You know, I should have probably taken a feed sample quality sample of it, as far as the nutritional value. But everything you read on, it just says it locks in that protein locks in that nitrogen or protein, all of that stuff gets locked in.

And with all this Roundup or what this alfalfa that we're putting up, it's the same way I would just as soon have an immature alfalfa plant that has four inches of rain on it than one that gets a lot of rain on it and, or a mature plant that has had no rain on it. I mean, just by cutting that plant at that stage of growth locks in those nutrient values.

So, so yeah, but rake, when it's wet, don't rake it when it's dry, you want that you want [00:35:00] that windrow to settle together. So what I can add to that.

**Holly Stoltz:** Okay. Seth, do you want to ask your dad a question? I'm sure. He'll appreciate it.

**Seth Barkley:** Okay. What'd you ever go back to conventional winter grazing, feeding every day and why?

**Todd Barkley:** No, never, ever, ever. Ever. So growing up our place was pretty small and, and my dad was outside employment and so we would do chores and everyday he'd come home in the afternoon and I'd be done with school and we'd go out and do chores and we'd get there.

And the cows would be waiting at the gate and take two people or else the cows were in the hay yard. I went to then I come home from college needed to figure ways. Sort of work myself in and save money, this, that, and the other thing went to Anne Fisher, put on a seminar in baker with Neil, Dennis from, from Canada.

And not only with his grazing [00:36:00] techniques, but also his winter techniques. And, and I started from there. And, and that's when Seth was young, he's a 25 on his own ranch. Now by Sentinel, Butte were really proud of him for that. He started to second guess some of the things his dad's been doing, which I'm not real proud of that, but he's, he's his own person now.

But, but anyways, the kids were young by doing some bale grazing and some of these other techniques we were able to, we were just able to enjoy our family, go on week long weekend trips without having to worry about the cows. So, so no other than the benefit economically. It was a huge benefit to our family life too.

And, and another thing about the economic side, I guess, liars figure and figures lie, but one thing that you just cannot argue about what some of these alternative wintering techniques is, it is just absolutely beneficial to soil health period. Absolutely no discussion otherwise on that, in my opinion.

And it's not [00:37:00] even opinion, it's a fact. So, so thanks for that question.

**Holly Stoltz:** Okay, Rick, you want to ask Cooper your question

**Rick Caquelin:** Hey Cooper. Tell us about how many cows are in the mob that you move every day. What kind of what's the cow per acre density, and maybe talk a little bit about how you deal with water and what percentage of the grass.

The winter grass that they're on, that you try and leave behind in a move thanks.

**Cooper Hibbard:** Great to hear you, Rick. So historically the mob that we've been dealing with, and when I say the mob for us in the winter time, it's our coming four year olds and up or coming to and coming three-year-olds we have full fee as well as our, our heifer calves and all of our other calves. So it's just, just are coming four year olds and not, we have them, that's our mob.

And historically that's been a group of about a thousand head. And right now it's 1200 head and

the [00:38:00] feed is. Two thirds of last year, anyways, as of right now. And so it's 1200 head on 24 acres has been about the average, but yesterday was an eight acre graze cause they're in some pretty thick stuff and that eight acre graze would have meant. So that's 150 cows, an acre for a day. Also 150 CDAs is the metric that we use for calculating amount of forage. That's harvested the volume, that's harvested CDAs, ADA's SDA scout days, per acre, what that stands for. And.

We'll be getting into a feed that's of that similar volume here for the next month, month and a half. So I, I think our paddock sizes will probably fluctuate between eight and 15 acres. And then moving away from water. So we, most, all of this is with polywire that we use a single strand temporary polywire the best.

Polywire that? We've [00:39:00] the one that we liked the most anyways is a Gallagher turbo wire. It some of the stuff that we bought 20 years ago, we, we still have. Whereas some of these other brands that we've tried just don't even begin to hold up compared to the Gallagher turbo wire. And then we get like the three-eighths inch fiberglass posts that are just not the pigtail stuff with the step in.

It's just one post that's pointed on one end and we get caps and pound those in, and we don't bother with clips or anything. We just do a single rap or a half hitch around those posts. As we go along in this post will be every 20 to 25 paces, but they'll have to fluctuate with the terrain. And if you have your, your water point we'll build out our grazes away from water.

So currently the mob, let's say the water points right, where I'm pointing on my chest here and. They're currently in a paddock, a permanent pasture that is a long rectangle. And so all we're doing is just [00:40:00] building these temporary break fences, moving away from water and to give access to fresh feed every morning, we'd just go out and we build the next break fence.

We S we see how they utilize that, that ground. We can recalculate the size of the paddock needs to be. We'll build the next break fence. We'll roll up the first break fence to give them access to fresh feed, either that, or we'll just open the gate. Yeah, and we'd like to have him go by us in the gate.

That's how we, we fence line wean all of our calves in the fall. And so that's how we train our cows for fence line weaning. We start training them now, getting them to go by us in the gate and be comfortable with that and trust us. And I think those were all your questions, Rick, let me know if there, if I didn't cover.

**Rick Caquelin:** How much grass do you leave behind? What percent do you kind of shoot for?

**Cooper Hibbard:** I don't really shoot for a percent and I don't shoot for a stubble height either. You know, is better than me. What percentage we leave behind. Cause I'm just not used to [00:41:00] looking at it with that lens. Really what we are looking for is first off, we don't want our cows to be hungry and we don't want to be pushing them too hard.

It's animal performance. First second is trying to, trying to get them to affect as many plants as possible if not every single plant. And once we strike that balance and it's time to move. So that's more the lens that I'm looking through. You know, when I first came home, what we were shooting for was a four-inch stubble height.

I don't think that exists. I don't think you can get a four inch stubble height. Some plants are going to be grazed on the best. Your best plants are going to be grazed down to the dirt. And then other plants that they don't really like are going to be eight inches tall. And that still kind of happens with in a non-selective grazing, but less.

So there's more animal impact in a non-selective grazing scenario. And that also highlights why non-selective grazing is important because in a more selective grazing scenario, if you don't provide adequate [00:42:00] rest, you're selecting for your undesirable species to out compete because you're desirable species are the ones that will be crazed grubbed down to the dirt and your.

Undesirables. We'll be the ones that aren't touched. Those are the ones that'll go to seed. Those are the ones that will shade, everything else out. They just have a leg up in that scenario. So what percentage Rick, would you say that we leave behind from what you've seen

**Rick Caquelin:** 30 to 40? How often do you come back?

**Cooper Hibbard:** Thank you for asking that I don't highlight that enough. So this feed has stockpiled all year, we're only in the winter zone from about December 15th to May 15th. And our growing season might start the end of, April. Certainly by the first week of may. And so wherever we are during the growing season, we won't go back to that spot during the growing season for.

It'd have two growing season rests. That doesn't mean that we don't go back there the next year. We go back there the next year and [00:43:00] graze it again during the dormant season, but we won't be on that ground during the growing season for until three years from then.

**Holly Stoltz:** Andrew, I think he answered your question, but so I didn't know if he had another one or,

**Andrew Anderson:** well, maybe I just got a little bit more quick. Yeah, Cooper. Thanks. You've already answered a lot of my question, but would you mind painting a a little more of a picture you were talking, you were talking about moving your your back fence away from water.

So that back fence is that connected to, to, two permanent fences, like high tensile or barbed wire and. This might be, you know, this probably varies for you, but when you're stringing up that polywire for a one day, graze is that, you know, several hundred yards, long quarter of a mile long. Can you paint a little bit of a picture of what that, what that looks like?

**Cooper Hibbard:** Yeah. So if you remember the, the permanent paddock I painted in the air for you, where the cows are right now that's barbed wire on one side and permanent electric on the other, but most of the time [00:44:00] it's strictly polywire. So we'll build these spines out with Polly, moving away from water and we'll try and build it to where we aren't.

Well, th that, that full paddock, that spine that we build out with all the break fences that we ended up putting in that you aren't in that full paddock. Definitely not longer than 10 days. Seven days is a little bit better, especially once the ground starts warming up, it just gets to be quite a bit of animal impact, closer to water.

So there's a lot of scenarios, Andrew, where we will do that all temporary. I can't remember the second question that you asked.

**Andrew Anderson:** I was just trying to imagine to my mind with that back fence, is that a long, long back fence? Yeah.

**Cooper Hibbard:** Yeah, so we used to, we used to make those pretty narrow you know, no wider than a quarter of a mile, but it seems like if you're, if your paddocks are a little bit broader, there's less trailing, that happens [00:45:00] less trails.

And so I'd say that it's between quarter of mile two third, a mile wide, you know, sometimes it's just like a couple hundred yards. It definitely does vary, but half a mile that's, that's getting pretty, that's getting pretty wide. I'd say quarter mile is probably about average.

**Holly Stoltz:** Wyatt, do you want to ask Brian a question?

**Wyatt Donaldson:** Yeah, it was just a quick question. I was just wondering if he has any issues with elk where there swath grazing.

**Bryan Mannix:** Yeah. So last year we did some like on an irrigated piece, but it's like right in the middle of these, the Elks winter habitat. So it's like surrounded by more dry land native stuff. And it was just back in the day, they made some ditches. So it's actually irrigated for a little while and we swath grazed that cause we weren't going to get to it with any cows for awhile.

And it was a lot milder winter. Then this year has been, it was open in January [00:46:00] and I was watching about 200 head of elk and they would just pass through it. And I don't know if that speaks to the quality of those swaths at the time. So I don't know why those elk weren't just hammering that last year, but they were just traveling through it and they weren't hammering on it.

And this year there. Close to 300 head that are in that winter range, just above the highway. And so far, we have not had them come down into those swaths yet. It's kind of an experiment going along. We also have a shoulder season in this area that we're allowed, allows us to apply pressure longer earlier and longer than the general season, which definitely helps.

So it's something that we're watching, but haven't had a trouble with yet.

**Wyatt Donaldson:** Thanks.

**Holly Stoltz:** Anything else. Anybody else have questions? Just go ahead and fire away.

**Bill Milton:** The first question is for all of you, you were all pretty candid that in this process of [00:47:00] improving your practice, doing a better job. All of it involved, some pretty significant, well, maybe not. It didn't sound like so much with you, Brian, but even you had a little bit, cause there was, there is a sort of an inevitable period of mistake.

Some pretty, in some cases, maybe almost pretty impactful economic mistakes. Can you just share your, your willingness as you went through this process? And I suspect you'll go through some more mistakes. If you're anything like me, I'm much older than you guys, but how do you relate to kind of risk mitigation knowing these experiments?

Aren't always going to turn out, especially at the front end, the way you had hoped. And then when these mistakes do occur, how do you How do you manage that, you know, in your business structure to, to accommodate the kind of losses that sometimes occur. So for all of you, I mean, basically you're doing [00:48:00] some great stuff and, but there is an economic impact in the process of learning.

And I'm wondering how you guys, how you guys manage that learning curve.

I don't go on once.

**Cooper Hibbard:** I can go first. That's a great question, bill. You know. I was fortunate enough to spend some time bouncing around with Bert Teichert. In fact, well he said a lot of things that have stuck with me. In fact, one of them relates to what Todd was saying when he goes out to feed. And you know, what Burke said was when he's loading, when he's loading the feed tractor, he's a nutritionist.

And when he's feeding out the hay, he's arranged scientist much to Todd's point of like you take that, take the act of feeding as an opportunity to build soil. Right? Another thing that Burke said, that's really stuck with me on this point, bill is fail fast, fail, cheap, [00:49:00] fail forward. And so I've, I really took that to heart when setting up these experiments and it's like, okay, how I'm obsessed with trying to find out what's possible

I love talking about what's possible. I don't like talking about what's impossible. I think that's a waste of time. I don't like talking about what we can't control. Let's talk about what we can control. Let's talk about what's possible, but how do you find what's possible and not bury yourself? And I, I think those three, that phrase at Burke shared with me if he, if he can figure out how, how to set up experiments to, to find what's possible in a way where you fail, fail fast, you fail cheap and you fail fail forward.

Then it will be a learning experience with, with a small tuition. I've certainly made the mistakes that have lasted, you know, the, the repercussions lasted for years. But with that much. When you're feeding hay, how can you make that an opportunity to build [00:50:00] soil? You know, as painful as those mistakes were there's always a silver lining and that some of the mistakes I made directly affected body condition, which then directly affected breed back, which indirectly affected how many cows we can run, which indirectly affected our bottom line and our ability to generate revenue.

And so finding myself in that situation and I pride myself on I, I don't really agree with the rhetoric of, of

you know, the, the, there's a certain amount of pride in some circles of running a lean operation with fewer people, you know, Fewer people per cows. I really pride myself on feeding as many families as possible. And that that'd be the last, the last thing to go. So it's like, well, how do we make this sucker work?

And because of that, we really, really got pretty creative with some, some marketing deals of just trying, how do we, how do we make lemonade in this situation? And got creative in ways that we wouldn't have had we not had I [00:51:00] not forced us into that situation through poor management. And it has served us and will be serving us into the future.

So it's, but really that's my current risk mitigation strategy. When, when approaching something where I have caution, it's like, okay, well, if this is something we want to do, how do we fail to fail fast and fail cheap and fail forward?

**Bryan Mannix:** I'll just jump in. Sure. Yeah, so I didn't do a very good job of explaining or sharing a lot of our hardships, apparently their bill. They'll go down that rabbit hole a little bit right now and share one of the, our current wrecks that we're in. Wally Olson says, anytime that you make management changes, you need to, you're going to pay a tuition price, and I can tell you right now I'm tired of paying tuition.

So this year we are, let's see, we moved our calving season back. So last year, 2021, our main [00:52:00] herd was calving April 20th. Through June the ones that calve June calve on their own. And our two year olds are calving in may and June. And when we made that, we were hoping that those cows could, winter those calves longer and try to utilize more of our hay.

That's just kind of cow quality hay, and the cow could supplement the calf and knowing that when we go along that process, when you go to wean, them is going to be made some on weather conditions, put most likely off of body condition. And so last June, we had a giant wreck of. Got scours in our two year old calves, lost of bunch we were IVing and a bunch of calves, big learning curve there, as far as that goes.

And we think it had something to do with the, when the feed changed and how hot it got there in June. Now, fast forward to this [00:53:00] winter or this fall, we had calves and cows coming home out of the mountains with pink eye. I haven't ever seen that before. I fought pinkeye all summer with stockers. Some were bought and some were home raised, fought that until almost till we sold them, we're lucky.

And we're able to sell them pretty much all of them, except for a few. And then as we go into this winter grazing with pairs and we're like, okay, this is kind of a different beast than what we usually have done. We'll just have to really, really pay attention. And I went out one day, Dave asked me to go look at what I thought the body condition was like.

I'm like, well, it's not great, but I think we can go a little longer. Well, knowing my personality, whenever I have that thought, that's probably the day that you should wean or pull them or do something, you know, whether it's move them. If I think they can go another day, I should probably move on that day.

It's just my personalities to push things to the limit. [00:54:00] And then you find where that limit was, was where you had that initial thought in my head anyway. And when we were winter grazing in those pairs we had, we started to S right before we pulled them off the winter grazing and started feeding those pairs.

We ended up seeing a couple of water bellies and don't usually see the. The pink eye was starting to get worse. Started seeing some pneumonia, like the calves health was just not great. And I don't think that they were going to water very well. And I don't think that they're probably getting enough mineral cause they were probably having to compete with the cows for the mineral intake.

And so currently I've got like 300 calves with pinkeye that we're just battling and I've been calling everybody that I can think of everybody that I've heard of podcasts talk about nutrition to not just like I'll do dang near anything to get out of the scenario that I'm currently in with these calves.

But also I want to, like, I don't just want to put a band-aid on. I want to find the [00:55:00] underlying condition of why is this happening? Like what are they lacking that their immune system is down? To where this there. So susceptible to these things in some of that was from that winter grazing. I'm pretty sure of it, but not, not all of it because this fall having those animals come out of the high mountain country with it was very abnormal.

So, you know, like I'm breaking, try and break everything down to like our whole mineral program currently. So there's a few wrecks or, yeah. One of the learning curves was just like, we probably can't graze those swamps with pairs. So what we're looking at now is you give up that grazing those swamps and those sedges, and just go on hay, sooner.

Or do you, do you wean sooner? And the problem with us for weaning sooner is we don't have a lot of high quality hay. We don't really farm. So we would have to buy some more inputs to do that, or. [00:56:00] Sell the cows in the fall. So those are kind of some things that we're wrestling with right now and trying to adjust as we go forward.

But back to your original question of how do you economically try to mitigate those learning curves and what I think that the brothers have done very well is placing small bets on something. And if it works exploit it, and if it doesn't learn from it, adjust or don't do it again, you know, kind of three options you got there.

But they did a really good job of like always being curious, always looking for a better way to do something understanding their environment and placing small bets. And then if that bet worked exploit it we moved very slowly kind of as a family, which can. Be a positive and a negative on these things, but that's one of the benefits.

And then the other way, I'd say that we've tried to mitigate these learning curves is just diversity of where you're selling things and your income. So right now, you know, we have [00:57:00] some stockers, we have stockers sell calves in the fall. Although we didn't this last year, we retained everything. Then we have our grass finished beef program.

And then we've sold a few calves for genetics replacement, heifers, that type of stuff. So anytime like looking forward to 20, 22, how do we mitigate this pink eye wreck and some of these help, you know, like if they can't go on the truck, Well, if you never doctored him, they can go into your beef program.

Now, all of a sudden that kind of, you didn't lose a lot. In fact, you might've gained something there. But for us, I would say it's multiple sources of either markets or income and placing small bets and trying to exploit the ones that work well.

**Todd Barkley:** Worst scenario. Right. And I got my daughter and my son on this call, so I can't even fib right.

**Bill Milton:** Competition is on.

**Todd Barkley:** Yeah. Okay. So I mentioned before I had a [00:58:00] couple of vitamin a. wrecks And in both of those wrecks, my cows were coming into calving in a five plus five and a half body condition score.

We just started and, and they were in, at that time, both times, we were calving in smaller pastures and pairing pairs out, you know, a day after they were born. And once they go out, then we use generally don't deal with them. And I started getting a bunch of calving issues, which we normally never have feet down backwards.

They just weren't getting presented. Right. And I, it was my turn to bale graze out. Or, you know, feed out and the cows that I kicked out and I'm out there and I find like 10 dead calves and I'm going, you know, what's going on? So, so we had some liver biopsies and it was vitamin a and and, and both times actually caught some sloughs the second time when we were doing the millet hay in the, in the wheat hay prior to calving and we run those cows in and gave them a vitamin a [00:59:00] shot.

So I've had. You know, in each, each, each one of those costs me, not quite 10% of my calf herd before we even got into calving. Right. So, so that was hard. I've had some choke cherries. We graze, this is summertime, but I suppose all of us do some things different in the summertime, during summer grazing, but I graze a lot of Burdoch in Canada, thistle in our Woody draws and the co a couple times we've had choked cherries, cost us 11 cows overnight.

One year I was grazing some failed pea crops with a lot of Kocha in it. And I lost about 11 cows. And that was because of nitrates in the kocha. And, and I was thinking with the protein, I would open up into some tame, grass pastures and balance that, that kochia off and Seth was in college at that time in a feeds class.

And he was bringing it up to his professor and his professor says, you know, them cows will get used to nitrates until you take them off it for a [01:00:00] day. So what was happening was they were getting used to the nitrates after I'd lose one, but then I'd opened them up into a pasture and they'd go in and they just lose that build up.

The choke cherry thing this year, we lost. Five cows to asthma. We got an August rain, the end of August, and we were in terrible, terrible, terrible drought. We grew more grass in August and we did all year, but anyways, we had a flush of green grass everywhere. We lose six cows, five or six cows, in two days there.

So how do you mitigate that? Well, through our winter savings on, on how we winter feed and then just the increase of our carrying capacity on our ranch, right? So, you know, you, you've heard a 200% increase on their, on their winter range. You know, we've increased our cow herd, you know, we've downsized our cows too, but you know, [01:01:00] on a place that used to run 250 cows are running 400 mother cows plus stockers and, and doing some other things With the same equipment, basically.

So, so how do you mitigate what we're doing while I lost 11 cows here? I lost 30 calves here, whatever, but you know, the increase in cow numbers sorta help mitigate that. We didn't, when we were running a traditional ranch at the carrying capacity we were at it just wasn't working, trying to raise a family.

We don't have outside jobs. We started doing some of these different techniques, increased our cow numbers. And as we are increasing our cow numbers, we are increasing our grass production. You could just see it. I don't, I don't measure things other than by eyesight. On a typical year, you know, we're on five to 10 day moves.

We're not on one day moves, but, but you could go to the front end of our, our moves and you wouldn't even think we had cows. And I have German shorthair dogs. I like to bird hunt are our, you know, we've always had habitat for bird hunt. So, so [01:02:00] yeah, so that's some of the mitigation that we have now, you come to my place this year and you couldn't bird hunt anywhere.

It's it's bad. And, and, and we, we were 25% open on our cows, 50% open on our heifers. We probably knew we were going to come into this wreck. We ultrasound everything everything bred up in the first cycle and, and just very little bred up after that. So, you know, my feeding program, I think worked cause then cows were in good enough condition.

to get through some of that, you know, our are, this country is just tough and this is one of those tough years. But, but I went, I went to a winter seminar in miles city, 27. I was just out of college. And before Burke was the head of the Deserette ranch. There was a, I'm not going to think of his name, Rick, can you think of it?

Manage the Deserette ranch. Isn't and he just said, you know,

**Bill Milton:** talking about Simon.

**Todd Barkley:** Yeah, there you go. Greg [01:03:00] Simons. And he, and he talked about fixed costs and opportunity costs. And, you know, it takes us the same amount of equipment to do 200 cows as it does to do 400 or 700 or whatever. And you know, pretty soon that cow starts or that, that cowherd starts paying for itself.

And that's how we've mitigated our risks. And then another thing I, I I'd like to say is that in all of this, and I think Brian insinuated it, but. You know, do you do a hundred percent of what you do at 60% or do you do 60%, what you do at a hundred percent? And I think that's just really important to take an aspect of this and do it a hundred percent.

And if it works, you know, when your comfort level gets into it, then just build upon that. But if we just do a hundred percent of the things that 60%, we're probably going to fail at everything. And another thing I'd like to add on our winter, [01:04:00] you know, the cows is we winter a lot on snow. Even though we have a pipeline in a pasture or whatever, if we have snow, we'll, we'll make our cows lick snow for water.

And and we've never had a wreck on that. So, but and we belong to an Eastern Montana regenerative ag group, and we have a meeting in February. And there's a lot of young producers, Seth included in that. And they all went through the Southeast, this whole drought nationwide actually. And we are mentors in that group and we have a lot of younger people wondering if what we're saying is actually working.

And so sometimes it's hard to be a voice out there, but but I think what we're going to see in the next years in the future is, is going to be the re reward. What we've been doing the last 20 years, you know, the sustainability of it. So did that answer it at all?

**Bill Milton:** I thought you guys all get an, a [01:05:00] plus plus for honesty and candidness.

It's pretty painful talking about wrecks, but basically we heard the rest of the story and I think like Holly, as we do these things. You know, we often get asked to be on panels because people think we're cool and they hear our cool stuff. They usually don't hear our wrecks because people don't ask questions like that.

And we can learn a lot more from our wrecks than we can learn from what we do. Cool. And you guys did a great job and I just hope we can leverage peoples, you know, going back to Cooper's fail quick, fail cheap. Well, maybe if we get together in a circle of more often talk about who's failing, who's failing the quickest and the cheapest that might advance all of our bottom lines.

So thank you very much.

**Holly Stoltz:** Anybody else have any questions?

**Paul Nehring:** I have a question regarding this regarding the pink guy. Since one of the things that I don't know, Cooper [01:06:00] can address this, but one of the things that the stockmanship people talk about is daily moves actually more than daily moves, but actually taking animals for a walk to reduce stress can actually reduce the incidents of certain things like pink eye.

I don't know if he would want to comment on that, on that or not. I've had experience with it on a small number of animals and it seems to make a difference seems to benefit, but I can't talk about it on a large group.

**Todd Barkley:** Can I add to this to Holly a little bit.

So we find pink eye a little bit this year in our, in our replacement heifers, but the year before in our entire cow herd also, so I think there's a new strain of pink eye going around. I mean, we have friends in Jordan that are fighting it now to about 25 years ago. My father-in-law had a breakout of pink eye and it ended up being red nose.

So when we got our pink eye, we did some testing for red nose too, and it wasn't red nose, but you know, so, so [01:07:00] pink eye and, and some of that can, can also be, you know, a different sign of some stuff. But two years ago, we tried to run our cows in one mob. Are, you know, our young cows are old cows and, and I just felt that, that I did put some extra stress on them, cattle and everything's closer at water.

I, I normally we brand later in June cause I'm farming and it it's just how it works through our rotation. And in June I do snap a fly tag and I pour them with cydectin done. And I still have dung beetles. I think there's sort of when it's hot in June, there, there may be hibernating to staying out of the heat.

But, but anyways, I decided, you know, I'm not going to snap a fly tag in them. I didn't run the cows right in and cydectin them. And and boy, did I have a wreck? This year. I did not want to go through that again. So I did slap a fly tag in them and I did pour them with cydectin then again in June. And like I said, we, we had [01:08:00] no problems on our cows and our calves.

And, and we did have probably 20 of our 110 yearling heifers that we were breeding have problems. And they were in a pasture in their own. And my other stockers or yealings didn't have pink eye. So, so I don't know. I mean, this, this, this just happens all of a sudden and not just, I mean, we have some traditional ranchers in our area that are fighting it too.

So, so I think there's a new, new, new strain in the air, but I guess that's what I can add to that.

**Cooper Hibbard:** So Paul from a stockmanship standpoint I've certainly heard of people taking cattle with foot rot on for a walk. And that actually helping I've I've seen that from, I have seen that from channeling stuff down from our forest service allotment, and maybe it was just a rock stuck between their toes or whatever, just getting a blood flow going.

Haven't [01:09:00] heard about that with pink eye, but I am a, I'm a big believer in the ability of stockmanship to mitigate stress in animals and any of these set situations where we put stress into our animals, whether it's through branding or shipping or receiving or preg testing or weaning it's incumbent upon us.

If, if we have the know-how to do what we can to take that stress out And well, you know, we have 1200 cows in a mob and I don't think there's one with pink eyes. So we're fortunate that these horror stories that you hear about haven't haven't struck us yet, but we have been well before I go down that rabbit hole back on the stockmanship deal.

We, wean all of our calves, typically fence line wean. If we have the feed to do it in the water to do that, and we hold all of our calves over the winter and historically, you know, calving in June is great. The downsides to that really comes in the fall with trying to [01:10:00] hit your breed up when your cows are breeding in September and October to hit your breed up goals.

And then. You know, when you're dealing with the weaned calf, that's 400 pounds, that's a different ballgame than a calf. That's 550 pounds. That rumen is still developing. They're much more sensitive animal. And our historical doctor rate for pneumonia in our calves in the fall was 23 and a half percent.

And then I really studied thanks to my uncle wit and all of his writings that he did and teachings that he came that he put together from bud Williams. It's all, it's all bud Williams. It's not uncle Whit's teachings. I really studied bud Williams and he's huge on exercising calves and focusing on calves, mental wellbeing and emotional wellbeing.

And so our historical Dr. Rate was 23 and a half percent in these calves, mostly pneumonia. And we started exercising our caps. You know, these calves there, they're depressed they're down in the dumps. So we take them for a walk. We take them to the feed ground. We [01:11:00] take them to water. It turns out they're super, super dehydrated.

In fact, I think that's what a lot of pneumonia was where these calves were just not taking themselves to water. And we're still, we still deal with that situation every year. We, after weaning, we gotta take these calves to water and then we take them for a run, get them to clear their lungs. And pretty soon, you know, we're taking for alum, taking them for a run there, they start bucking and kicking.

And all of a sudden they're getting excited about life and you show up to take them to exercise these calves. And they're like bouncing on Pogo sticks and they aren't like these depressed kids in the basement anymore. They're excited to go to soccer practice kind of a deal. And. Once we started doing that the first year our doctor rate went down to 4.7% the next year it was 2%.

And then after that, it was one, it was in the one and a half percent range. And that's about where we've been in that, that 2% range since aside from, from one bad year. So I think that mental and emotional wellbeing and that ability to [01:12:00] mitigate stress because stress does happen to them and your ability to take that out, just because when an animal's stressed that the first thing they do is they burn their mineral, their mineral reserves.

And that leads me to the next thing, which has been a big topic is nutrition and minerals. We did have a big pink eye break with our steer calves four years ago. It ripped through our steer calves and our steers were gap certified. And so I was just scrambling. I was just like, man, what can we do?

Are there any options aside from antibiotics? And we took swabs and all this other stuff fortunately it wasn't a virus, it wasn't actual pink eye. It was a bacteria probably because of hay, getting in their eye and scratching their eye. And and that scenario turns out, well, a guy in the crew and, and a friend of mine who who's done this thousands of times, he says, WD 40 works.

Great. So we actually did a experiment. I hesitate saying this to so many people, but we sprayed WD 40. And a portion of our calves eyes, the others, we set [01:13:00] up a control group, some got WD 40, some got antibiotics. The worst case definitely got antibiotics and the WD 40 calves actually healed up as fast or faster than, than the calves that got antibiotics.

And so we started just using WD 40 and it worked and it worked great in that scenario for us. And I ended up talking to a vet afterwards. He was a vet for Multimen cause we're working with them on this liver biopsy trial because we mixed up our own mineral. Because another issue that we're having was internal parasites in these weaned calves that we just could not get away from weaning our calves two, three times in the winter and it just didn't worming our calves two, three times in the winter and it just didn't make sense.

And so we I heard an Nicole masters give a presentation. And she said, you know, any, any cow that's ridden with internal parasites is deficient in copper and anything that has external parasites, lice is deficient in sulfur. And there's this mineral that you can mix up yourself. So that addresses both of those components.

And so again, set up an [01:14:00] experiment where our Wagu calves were put on this deal called copper lick. And our other calves are steer calves. This was a year they're on just a generic range. Mineral, the steer calves got pink eye, the Wagyu calves. And actually this is the second year of the experiment because their heifer calves are on the copper lick.

Wagyu calves and heifer, calves did not get pink eye. The only difference between the three groups was a mineral that they're on and The Multimin vet that I was talking to. He said, you know, in that scenario where it's mechanical, a scratch in the eye from say, hay particles, getting in. The reason that scratch is happening in the first place is because they're deficient and copper and zinc.

And what copper and zinc do are they that's like if you picture it cell structure, the, the cellular wall that nice rigid structure is supported by copper and zinc. If they're deficient and it's like the soft flimsy deal that scratches really easily. And so when, if they're deficient and copper and zinc, and they get hay in their eye [01:15:00] scratches, I, in your average bacteria, that's everywhere, which is the bacteria we were dealing with just zooms, right.

Just get sucked right in, and that scratch and latches into the scratch. And that's when the infection starts. And what that WD 40 did was it's, it's a water displacer. So flushes that bacteria out of the scratch and it hangs out in that scratch long enough for those cells to regrow that's according to him, how and why it works.

It did for us, it, it, it, it has for many other people, I don't know if it had worked for viruses, probably not. So through that, that was one of, one of quite a few experiences where I'm a huge believer in getting your mineral program. Right. Even if it's fairly expensive. And since going with the copper lick, you know, we've only had to deworm our calves once in five years, and we haven't poured anything for years and our cows don't they'll, they'll get some lice, but Not as much as they did when we were pouring them for [01:16:00] lice.

**Bryan Mannix:** I see it has come up a couple of times. So I'm just gonna also let people know. We backs, we had a vaccine for that pink eye and took swabs and it was a different variant of what we vaccinate for. And we had a vaccine made up of one that would cover both of the variants. And, but we couldn't get it made for a while as I'm sure everybody's still with getting things done in a supply chain things.

So that we got that in probably three finally got it in them like three weeks ago. Hoping that that mitigates it, but so far it's, hasn't much, we just took new swabs again last week and sent those in again. But I just see the vaccine and new variants popping up. So it was a different variant.

I'm just throwing that out there.

**Bill Milton:** No, I'm just going to ask Brian, you know, so [01:17:00] this Multimin, which we're debating, whether we would use this or not. And based on what Cooper just said, Cooper, if he just vaccinated with Multimin and actually addressed what you think could be a copper zinc, or whatever deficiency, how quickly would that. I mean, I don't know how expensive, I don't think it's that expensive, but what if he just vaccinated with Multimen did a quick test

**Cooper Hibbard:** and I know you addressed this to Brian bill, but I just want to be clear.

I just happened to be talking with the Multimen vet that we weren't using. Multimin I'm not endorsing I'm in, I'm not endorsing Multimen. We were doing the liver biopsies and he wanted the information from our biopsies. And so he paid for the Multimin paid for that, the biopsies to be done. I do think that WD 40 would probably, I there's no way that would work if it was, if you're dealing with natural virus, I think it only works if you're dealing with the bacteria [01:18:00] because of scratching.

**Bryan Mannix:** I can confirm that

**Bill Milton:** can't wait until you solve the problem and tell us how you did it.