Bull Session May 1, 2023 - Forage Supply

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Welcome everybody to tonight's bull session. We're doing a April may for our last session for the spring. And we thought it'd be really good conversation now that we need to get out and start grazing here pretty soon about how.

To match our forage supply with our livestock demand. And I know personal experience, not having any experience with the pasture that we're gonna be grazing this summer, it's been a challenge trying to figure out how many yearlings we can actually run without going out and being able to measure our grass.

So I'm very excited about tonight and I'm sure I'll learn a lot. And please, like we, we have quite a few people on, so keep your, keep yourself muted if you don't have a question. And then if you have a question, just turn it back on again. But we also do record these so that we can save them on our website so you guys can view 'em and listen to 'em [00:01:00] later.

So give me about a week, and a half sometimes to get that up on the internet or on the website. But, so anyways, I guess we'll get going. And I didn't really talk about what order to go, but I guess I always go age before beauty. So who would that be? See you. I think you're on Roger. And then the other two can slide over.

Who's the beauty? Oh, I'm sorry. I misunderstood you. You met beauty before H No. Okay. Oh, yes. But I should introduce our speakers. We do have Roger Erland, Bart Morris from Oxbow over in Missoula, and Wyatt, Donald from Big Timber Area as well too. And Roger's from Big Timber. So I'll let you take it away.

Roger, I don't know if you need any assistance from me, but if you do let me know. Okay, thanks. Appreciate it. So Matt and your, forage with your [00:02:00] livestock or how many livestock you're guessing how you're, how many you're gonna have. Is that kind of the, main thing you're thinking about, Holly?

That is the main thing. Yeah. Yeah, it's something we do on an ongoing basis is trying to est make that estimate. There's, certainly things that we can go back to some historical stuff, but like Holly, like you're talking, if you don't have historical information about a pasture or something, or an area it leads you with making what I would call big picture predictions.

And then there's a lot of things to think about as you're looking at that do you want to graze every acre? And I think you, just start with the big picture questions of how much ground or how much land of what type do you have. And

So I, like to start with how many acres of what kind of ground [00:03:00] and that, or what the production potential is. Meaning basically sparsely covered dry land, which might be 150 pounds an acre up to sub irrigated meadow type that might produce 3000 pounds an acre, graz forage.

As far as getting to it could even be 4,000 I'm sure, in some areas. But so I like to just break it first into those categories about how many acres of each kind of ground there is improved pasture Probably double the it, it could be 1500 to 2000 thousand acre and a lot of native range can be around seven 50 to a thousand, or it can be 300 depending on the average.

And you gotta extrapolate because a lot of landscapes have cools and certain number of acres in there that are, gonna produce [00:04:00] a thousand, 1500 pounds an acre. And there's the rest of it. Other areas that are gonna produce closer to the two, 300 pounds an acre. And I like to start with total production or total production estimates.

And then decide from there what, how much of it, how much do you want to use of that and also what areas you might take your total acreage and just right off the top, Say we're gonna reduce that by 15 or 20%. If you're gonna rest a portion of ground every five years, you'd have to take 20% of that acreage or that total production off.

And then, you decide which areas. But if you've got experience with looking at your grass and looking at your grazing two things that I think are really, important is one and, there's a, it goes back to the clippings and stuff that, [00:05:00] that RA range people do to take a square yard or a square meter.

And this is based on a dry matter basis. And I do everything on a dry matter basis. And you, take that square meter, square yard, and if you clipped it, to the ground. And this would be like in the fall. You're starting out here in the spring and you're just, you're really guessing cuz you're really not sure what your precipitation is gonna be and how it's gonna grow.

But for instance, in the fall, you could clip that what you had, if you were doing stock pile feed, you'd have your growth and you would you clip that and dry it down. Normally it's dried down almost enough, especially if you're doing it in September and October or late September and October to, it's really, close to being enough to close enough to dry matter basis.

You take and weigh that in grams, multiply that by 20 and that gives you [00:06:00] your pounds per acre of dry matter. And as a rule of thumb, a big handful of dry matter, if you just grabbed out of a square yard area and you had a handful. The size of a baseball, pretty compacted. Not a base, a softball actually fairly compacted.

That's gonna be about 240 pounds an acre. Normally that's right around 20 grams of dry matter which times 20 equals your 240 pounds break acre. So then you can start to guess if you do multipliers of that. So that's one, one thing that, that I do and, I think about a lot is, round big picture numbers to make sure you're on track for the long term.

The other thing I do quite a bit is also a lot of rounding involved, but I take the classes of cattle I'm gonna have and they're estimated weight [00:07:00] times 3% and that's a dry matter basis also. That's daily forage requirements. Then multiply that however many head, whatever weight times 0.03 as the pounds are gonna need per day.

And look at that going, forward. Like in the fall. That's, a critical thing for us because we're looking at how much stock pile fee do we have available and what, what's that gonna look like? This time of year we're more looking and hoping precipitation is, gonna be a key player.

But this right now, this time of year right now is probably the very most awkward time because it's really hard to zero in on what kind of forage growth you're gonna have for the year. But. You can ru you can estimate it and project it forward. And with a pretty short growing season here from our perspective on it, with cow calf operation year round, adding up all the different classes of livestock and,[00:08:00] we would en I would estimate by the end of July, our growing season's basically over.

And at that point, I wanna make sure that I've got well over a year's worth of forage standing. And I think that's where you're matching yours, your, what you think you're gonna have for livestock versus the forage that you're gonna have to, use on a year-round basis. That doesn't mean you don't have some hay and some other things as, buffers for that.

But I think from a planning perspective, Picking some time that's at least midway through the growing season or towards the end of it is and, doing that estimate. So you aren't get, it's kinda like counting hay bales. That's what people do in a traditional model is you graze everything off and hay everything you can hay and then then you go count your hay bales and then you [00:09:00] decide how much you're gonna buy or what you gotta need to sell.

And really, in a big picture, that really is what that amounts to. That's our perspective on that. I don't know if that

really helps a lot when you are looking at how many you're trying to stock on ground that you're not at all familiar with, but, I do think you can make irrigated ground is gonna produce it at some level. Dryland is gonna produce at some level, and also on I, do know that if you went into and talked to a range con from your area on dryland, you would certainly get some estimates.

Somebody has been doing some clippings and they know what the production potential is. Now from there, it's all management. How much do you wanna leave and how much cover do you wanna leave? How much do you wanna take each time or do you wanna do it twice? From there, there's all those considerations.

Then the, twice over, if you're gonna do irrigated ground and graze it two, maybe even three times in a [00:10:00] year. That's, the same, basically the same thing as first, second, and third cutting. Except you're probably not. Taking the total, amount and you're, probably leaving quite a bit more cover, but you, can, you'll get your two or three grazes and you can estimate by your weight class what that's gonna mount to on a dry matter basis.

And I always think one thing that I, always think in pounds per acre, and I know a lot of people, and I've heard people at different things talking about stock days per acre. And I just started out thinking in purely in pounds per acre and pounds consumption depending on the class of livestock and the weight.

And I like to keep that in mind. And I, just, I guess a couple cases I've heard people talking about, yeah, I got 50 stock days per acre off of that piece of ground and it, so to me that's a little bit. Almost like a competition. Like how many stock [00:11:00] days per acre can you graze? I think that really misses the point because we have to keep in mind that the big picture management is what's gonna carry us through.

It's not how much you can graze off that year. There's certain cases that might be when, you get to a dry year and you're looking at your total inventory and you may say if the market's down or, whatever's going on, maybe we do want to graze this tighter than we had planned. But having, those big picture numbers so that as you whittle away at it and you're continually basically comparing that so you know what, how much of your inventory you're, taking away, I think is, that's critical, thinking about.

As far as forward planning and in most of Montana with a pretty short growing season by certainly certainly by the end of July, middle of August,[00:12:00] I can't imagine hardly anybody on this call. It doesn't pretty much know how much wouldn't have the ability to know how much forage they're gonna have available.

And it's gonna be a guess on how the growing season develops. And that can be, take common production from your area, extrapolate that out, and probably give yourself a 20 or 30% buffer and you're more than likely safe. That's, my, my, my guess for, making those estimations is that, does that making any sense?

Bart or Wyatt, do you wanna kind of chime in and explain like how you guys do it too? And then we'll just open it up for questions and everybody can, we can come back to you, Roger, if you wanna add something or whatever, but would that work for you guys?

Go ahead Wyatt.

Thanks, Bart. So I've found that telling Holly that you might possibly be a participant on a call [00:13:00] is like me telling our church pastor that I could possibly help with a project. It means, oh, I guess you're gonna do it. So I actually didn't have any I haven't really. Prepared at all. I was out branding all day to day, but just I really appreciate Roger's thoughts and gives me a lot to go over on how we look at it.

And we look at it a few different ways. One is we operate on several different ranches and there's some ranches where we are running strictly a cow calf enterprise. And then there's some ranches that we're running cow, calf and a stocker enterprise. And then there's some ranches that we're running where it's just strictly a stocker enterprise and those strictly stocker enterprise ranches we're looking at basically a, 120 to 150 day grazing season.

And then when we're running a on [00:14:00] our cow calf enterprise, they're. There really isn't a season, it's just based on a year round grazing model. And so we need to be thinking a lot further ahead on those, for those enterprises and on those ranches than we do on the ranches where we're just grazing a stocker enterprise where it's just a, defined season.

So the, planning and the execution look pretty different. The, planning for a defined season with the stocker enterprise is, in my mind, a little more simple, but the execution is really critical. And I think to Roger's point about doing some sort of an appraisal midway through the season to see where you're at that's something that we do on those ranches for sure.

All the ranches, but the, the. shorter season ranches. It's [00:15:00] just really critical because we're trying to graze a ranch just right in a short season, so you don't have the luxury of maybe skipping a pasture and coming back to it for winter grazing if you didn't get to it or just changing things up.

Now the, ranches where we're grazing mostly cow calf the planning is difficult because you're thinking like 400 days in advance it seems like all the time. And that can be a little bit tricky to really figure that out, or it seems to me it is anyways. But the execution isn't quite as critical in that.

You've got more time on your hands and you're making an evaluation midway through the season, say the end of July, like Roger was talking about. And we, at that point, on the Cal calf side of things we want to have enough grass to make it through till June or so the next year.

And if you're a little [00:16:00] short one way or the other you don't have to change things quite as drastically as you would on that shorter season where you only have 60 days left in your season, so you gotta, either you shorten your season or reduce numbers or something like that.

So as far as how to measure it in our planning process we, there's a few things that we, have to know and, one would be our acreage. Acreage per pasture would be ideal. And then the other is some sort of an educated guess, or based on historical knowledge or through consulting with other people of what how many, what the production of that pasture's gonna be.

And when we do talk about production and, grazing, how much we're grazing, we actually do deal with pretty much strictly just stock days. And I think you could convert that fairly easily to pounds. [00:17:00] And just assuming that maybe one stock day is 30 pounds of dry matter, I think that's pretty safe.

Safe guess. And then we just go on pounds of body weight. So the other one is you have to do a stock day factor for, whatever class of animal you're grazing. And if we're. Grazing pairs in the summer we're going to just go on total body weight of that cow calf pair. So you know, it, it might be 14, 1500 pounds.

Whereas a, dry cow in the winter might be 1200 pounds, so we'd be 1.2 stock days for those. And then the yearlings are basically just based on weight at turnouts. So if they're 700 pounds and we turn 'em out and 900 pounds and we ship 'em off, we just adjust that rating through the season as we go.

Just assuming if relatively consistent gain, we're probably gonna load that to the front a little quicker, thinking that they're gonna gain quicker just at the beginning of the season than they would be [00:18:00] later in the season. A lot of our. Places. We've got quite a bit of historical data from grazing them for several years and we, know pretty good, have a pretty good idea of what, each pasture is going to yield depending on what our moisture conditions are.

I would say if if we don't have that information a good, just really rough guess for, I think for Native Range anyways. And, you could probably increase it a little bit for introduced and then irrigated is gonna be a different deal. But you can, I think, roughly guess one stock day per acre, per inch of rainfall.

And I'd love to get Trevor Smith's thoughts on this too, cuz he's, thinks ahead a lot on, these things and I think that's, But that's a pretty rough, guess. And so if you're in a a 12 inch rainfall area, I think [00:19:00] you're somewhere around 12 could be close.

And then that's, a pretty good way to adjust it as you go through. If you're, if you just didn't get the reins you thought you were going to in the spring, but you don't really have any basis for what the pasture should look like in a normal year or even what your normal precip might be.

If you're measuring your precipitation, I think you can do a decent job of, guessing. And I would just probably err on the side of caution a little bit if you don't have that historical knowledge to for stocking it. And especially if you're just dealing with defined season I think.

You want to give yourself a little bit of leeway there,

bart, do you wanna go? And we'll see if we can get him back on. Yeah. Natalie's gonna, I'll leave us off. Yep. And Bart will join in. So we just spent the last couple hours working [00:20:00] on our grazing plan for the, year and into next year. And it was really hard like why it was saying, it's like there's all these unknowns and unpredictable factors and we err on the side of caution and under calculating the forage in hopes that we'll be surprised that there's more forage. And so that kind of left us worried oh, maybe there's not, maybe there's not enough grass and we have to full feed for this many months. And that was the first time that I've ever done this. Wyatt, to hear you say that it is complex and time is on your side is helpful cuz I was a little bit stressed after that.

But basically we, I guess the main thing in calculating forage is whether your brain thinks an animal days per acre or in pounds per acre. [00:21:00] And I, in like my short career, I've learned to measure grass in animal days per acre. So like when I look at a pasture, that's where my brain goes. And because I've.

Worked for Bill and I know what a paddock there looks like and then, and how many adas are available before we graze it, and then what it looks like afterwards. That's been helpful in coming here and having diff my mind, like my mind can look at different pastures and assess the adas and then like after the cows are turned in and grays then left, then I actually calculate it.

And that's I think I'm getting pretty good at guessing. And so that's, I guess that's, the way that here at Oxbow that we assess is like going to the paddock and looking and using our eyes and all the training our eyes have [00:22:00] gotten to, to guess how many adas and then we know our animal units.

And we know is we know when we're gonna put the cows in there. And so we know our acres. Yeah, we know our acreage. So all that's left is is I'm guessing the adas, we can use the equation to figure out how many days they'll be in there. And that's how we figured out our whole year grazing plan is just like going back to Bart's historical data of what we got last year and what we got in here as previous in that specific paddock.

And then also taking into account rainfall for that year. That's a big component too. And then also something that's helpful for me in thinking in ADAS is like percent utilization. So I can think about what that paddock looked like when we left and then put like a. And our grazing records put a percentage that was taken.[00:23:00]

So like to Roger's point of people comparing adas to me, like when I hear that we got 30 adas in this one paddock, I'm like, oh yeah, and we, you took everything and that was really bad. That was a bad graze. And so if if I, if the 30, ADAs days is paired with the 100% utilization, I know that 30 is way too high, even though that's what we got last year versus if it's this sub irrigated like front hay pasture and we're getting like 20 ADAs and 60, 70% utilization, I know that.

And that it's like a 12 inch rainfall year. Like that is information that we can reuse that to predict for this growing season. Yeah. The other piece of this that's super complex is like we run yearlings, finishers and pairs. And so one of the things that we just [00:24:00] did this afternoon that really helps us out with this ADA, is standardizing that.

And like we have an Oxbow standardization. We're not trying to fit anybody else's cuz it's, it works for us here. And so what we do is we put we based on the year, based on the year starting January 1st through December 31st, we'll go through and we'll standardize, to accommodate for when those calves are growing on those cows.

Just like Wyatt was talking about, if you have a 1100 pound p and a 300 pound calf, that's. 1400 pounds. And we have a, and we account for that in our, and we standardize that when we wean, which we don't know when we're gonna wean every single year, but we have an idea of, the time we, we, know that those animals, those calves are gonna leave that cow, they're gonna move to yearlings, and [00:25:00] our animal unit is gonna drop to say 1.1 as opposed to where it was at 1.6.

But I guess the, story there is to, we have a table that shows us the standard, or we just developed a table that standardizes that. So we know the same every year. So we're not trying to, like every month we're, trying to increase those pounds on, the deal. We just have it, it goes up. In March, it goes up again in June, it goes up again whenever we have that standardized.

So that, that's a big deal on us simplifying it so we can figure it out. And then what you guys were talking about mid-season, checking it and seeing where you're at on this is Natalie has, we have our, we have a spreadsheet that has our, plan with all our adas and our pastures and where we're going and that.

And then she, is update every time we move. She updates the actual, so we know if [00:26:00] we're ahead or if we're behind in that way. And so it's a running, real time running deal. Like we either know we're, host, or we either know we're doing pretty good and it'll change from time to time. Yeah.

Yeah. And so we just did that today. So the. Our mother herd is in like a hundred, they're in a hundred acre paddock, but we're using poly wire to subdivide it. So like we're giving them, or we figured out that giving them five acres every two days is enough. And so even though they're still like 50 acres left, we can, while we're in the move, we can calculate our adas to figure out how much time is left.

So it's not like after we pull 'em out, then we have to assess like we can still, I guess we can still make that assessment while we're grazing. Yeah. We gained what, five days today with him? Yeah. Which is huge. [00:27:00] Yeah. If that makes sense. Yeah. And then another thing, maybe this is where I get really confused if anyone has any insight, but like I.

Using, because I said my brain thinks in adas and like in the fall going from adas to then all of a sudden starting to supplement with hay. And that's always like in pounds. That kind of gets funky for me. And so the, what we've been doing is figuring out how many, if we're just supplementing them like eight pounds per head per day, then we reduce we reduce their animal units.

Is like how we figured out how to do that, to continue to think in adas. But it would, but what Roger was saying, if you are calculating everything in pounds per acre anyway than just adding more pounds of hay, kind of those things make sense. Those are like parallel, but ADA is this conceptual thing that you [00:28:00] have to learn.

And then going to pounds of hay, it doesn't really compute for me.

Yeah. I'd like to know if any of you have the grasshopper factor included in this.

We lo we lost all of our winter. There you go. Speed to the grasshoppers this year looks like we live in a desert. We had five months winter that we didn't account for and we're not accounting for that same thing again next year. So we're just planning what is average or what is normal and we're hopefully being conservative.

I think there's a lot of unknowns there. I, don't think you can possibly plan for at all. I think if you planned for bad grass hoppers and a really nasty winner every year, then would be pretty tough to make ends meet. [00:29:00] I think you gotta be able to take a little bit of risk but not sink the ship in doing it either.

We've certainly dealt with plenty of grasshoppers and I know there's several people on this call that deal with them too. And that's one of those things where you just gotta adjust it as you're going. I think maybe when you did your mid-season evaluation or your evaluation there at the end of July, Didn't look too bad, but by the end of August things are pretty well creamed and I think you just have to adjust the same way you would if you were hoping to be able to graze out all, winter and, you end up getting snowed under completely, even if you live in an area that generally doesn't do that.

We've certainly dealt with that a few times, a little to a certain degree this year. Did whether it's adjusting by cutting numbers or supplementing [00:30:00] feed or feeding more you just have to run the numbers and figure out how to make it work.

I agree, Wyatt with that it's, you, there's no way you're gonna get every, possible scenario. And you're, always gonna be off in your big picture estimate. There's gonna be something by having a buffer is part of what I think really makes the grazing system work because you on average or better than average years, I think having that buffer built in for cover is, what really makes, is where the progress really comes from.

And a little bit the flip side of that is, is we've had times when, it looks like it's gonna be dry, you're pr your, you think your [00:31:00] estimates are, you're starting to air and you're starting to air the wrong direction. And it, you can buffer that to some degree, but you gotta really be careful, I think, because one way to buffer that is to increase your utilization.

So if you'd estimated that you're gonna, that you're gonna use say trample a third, use a third and leave a third standing as a example you're actually only calculating to use 30, 33%. So you do have a 66% buffer in there that if you increase your utilization to 66%, you've actually doubled your, what you can take now, you're gonna, you're gonna compromise your cattle and if you go to 80 or 90%, you're gonna really compromise your cattle.

But sometimes when we've done that, we've found that. Then the next year or two, if we give it adequate rest, that's where we get the best response. So that, that [00:32:00] really high utilization at certain points we found to be a very valuable tool. course I don't think that's a wise policy with stockers probably isn't why I dunno how you'd execute that, but we do have some flexibility with ca with, the pairs.

I mean there's some things you can do as long as it's not during breed up or prior, just prior to calving. There's some time when, you can, actually get a lot more mileage out of that. Then there's times when those cows really probably can get by on 2% or two and a half. We've done some stuff with some dry cows where I'll bet it was less than 2%, but utilization was probably 95%.

And that results in being a real tool that we can use going forward. And that's but you gotta build that rest in sometimes three years or at least two following that. But but to answer your question about the [00:33:00] hoppers, I don't it's hard, really hard to make happen. I think another really valuable tool can be is to have multiple enterprises and rank 'em.

And most of our places we have maybe a cow calf enterprise and a stocker enterprise. And if something unforeseen happens, whether it be hoppers we can ship, get one enterprise gone, then that's usually the yearlings. And so we can ship them early or. Like this winter, for example we, we winter quite a few calves on our ranch.

And so basically all of the hay that we have is generally for the yearlings. But we got snowed under this winter and had to start feeding some cows. And so we just shipped calves to a growy yard and that was just basically our built-in buffer so that hay, it was at our ranch instead of going to calves got shifted to [00:34:00] cows.

Now still expensive and you really gotta run your numbers to make sure that is all going to work. And I think depending on the market situation if it was different than it is right now, we might have made a different decision, but we thought that feed was worth it to keep our cattle inventory as high as we can.

Considering the value of those cattle.

The most priceless piece of this whole thing that what I'm hearing is that mid-season, the late season inventory with us, it's a day-to-day inventory as we're going through it every time Natalie updates that. But because that gives you the realtime check, I guess is what I'm hearing from, Roger and Wyatt on the deal.

And to me that's the aha moment for me is like knowing we predict, we guess, then you carry it out and then you go back and double check [00:35:00] and if you're in trouble, if you're riding for trouble or not.

I do think Wyatt's really on to something with the, depending on the market because and from our perspective if it's bulls and we decide to supplement them with substitute feed or other supplements in a fairly short window, we're gonna see the, we can basically make that a marketing cost.

I know Wyatt had that discussion about once you've decided to sell something, some of, a lot of the inputs are basically a marketing cost. I, it probably to some degree, barge. Same for you with, you're finishing. That's But that's a lot easier to do when the market's moving up than it is when it's moving down.

And yeah I, just think playing that game a little bit with looking at the market to assist in making those decisions and, even that on the market for the cattle as well as the market for [00:36:00] the feed. So there's two sides to that equation. Would you be ahead to maybe it should be really under stocking in a low market and selling the feed cuz there's somebody who is not doing the math and will pay too much for it and I guess playing those different angles are, important.

Do any of you guys figure pounds per inch.

I think that stock days per into rainfall is similar, Trevor as far as what what's produced in the pasture?

Yeah. Yeah. I was just wondering if you used it to plan going forward,

I think, or I guess the way that has been introduced to me is like a tool to measure caring capacity of like your entire ranch. But I don't think we really use it but the light, a light [00:37:00] bulb moment for me was what Wyatt set up. Like in the rainfall in your area is what is standard and that is.

We got Exactly. Or our average ADA last year was exactly our average rainfall here. Which is cool

because I guess what I've found, I've tracked the, I've tracked the stock days per acre, per inch rain and the pounds per acre. And it, all basically balances out. But what I've found is if I can if I'm gonna get average moisture for this year, at least I have a pretty good idea of how many pounds I'm gonna grow.

Cause we grow 90 pounds per inch of rain, so you can put that to three stock days per acre. So that at least gives me an idea of right now we're, if I'm looking at my deal we're, actually behind on our stock days produced as of May [00:38:00] 1st. So that's how I. How I think about it.

What do you mean you're behind Trevor? As far as how much grass you've grown so far this season, or how many stock days you've taken in the past or? No, basically I just, I'm constantly rolling my figure, so I should have on average have grown at least one stock day by now, and I've only grown a quarter of a stock day basically, according to the amount of rainfall.

Okay, so your assumption is that you're gonna grow 90 pounds per inch of rainfall and you just haven't had the rainfall. So you're not assuming that you're growing less per inch of rainfall, you're assuming you just haven't had the rain. Yeah, exactly. It's all a function of rain. You're probably growing more, but yeah.[00:39:00]

Might have to call your yearling guy and cut some numbers, huh?

Yeah, I'm thinking

when you talk about the pounds per inch of rain, I'm assuming that varies depending on whether it's native or tame or what different, what the crop, if it's forage.

Yeah, we just have pretty much all native, we have a few crested wheat fields, but yeah, it's for the most part native and it's an average over the ranch. There's some places that are only probably 50 pounds and then others are probably 120, so it's just a kind of an average.

And Wyatt on the pounds or stock days per inch of rain, have you noticed any have you noticed having to calibrate differently if you experience success of heat above normal temperatures for, let's just say June, when things are growing and it's, really hot for a [00:40:00] period of time, do you have to back that off or does that remain constant?

I think that's a really good point, Andrew. I think the heat does have a lot to do with it also. And I don't know. We certainly don't have a system in place to account for that other than just flying by the seat of our pants like we do it seems like most of the time anyways, but be like it's really hot and how much good are we actually getting out of this?

The moisture that we've received. And another good example is we, theoretically had quite a bit of moisture this winter but most of it ran down the creek on top of frozen ground 10 days ago. And it's in our mind basically didn't get much good out of any of that moisture. We feel like we could use a shot of rain right now even though theoretically we're a little bit ahead of schedule on how much moisture we've received.

So I think there's variables [00:41:00] like that, just like the very the hopper variable or anything. This is. It's so fluid. There's just there's a lot to it. And that's where the maybe almost more art and science part of it comes in. I think just and every ranch is different too, yeah. And I, agree totally with why it said that kind of the, odd thing we had happen last year was we had a two and a half inch rain in July and that just threw my precipitation off. But I, actually don't think we grew the grass. So my, figures are probably skewed. It's just how pretty more art than science.

I think.

I think Trevor, I would agree with that because I think depending on when rainfall comes, There's a different value to it. Of course it's [00:42:00] always valuable, but it's certainly, gonna grow different amounts of feeds per inch. But I still really think there's value in, in a rolling, 12 month average.

And I think from a big picture perspective, if you combine a rolling 12 month average precipitation with planning, like Wyatt was talking about 365 to 400 days forward, I think those are the things that then build in a buffer that allows you to at least mitigate hoppers or dry weather coming. Because you should recognize that if you've got a 12, 12 month rolling average on your precipitation And that's starting to steadily go down for two or three months in a row.

Indications are that your next year, you better start thinking about what your inventory's gonna look like a year from now. And especially if we [00:43:00] go back to a little more of an overall ecological land planning process of what is best for the underground livestock, rather than just how much can we use aboveground.

I think then you start to get a little bit more of a complete projection. And that's where cases where you're doing a high utilization on an area that you think can stand it or that needs it, can help you to offer that as well. So those are just some random thoughts, but yeah, I think one rolling average is pretty valuable.

Roger. And we've actually started measuring, so a rolling 12 month average, and then a rolling 24 month average and a rolling 36 month average. So one, two, and three years. And I think that's, been pretty interesting to monitor two because the 12 months is that's your top soil in my [00:44:00] mind.

The two year the, two year average. And, certainly the three year average, that's probably your sub soil there. And you can get by with a dry year, like in 2020 for example. That was a pretty dry year, but we got by pretty well. And I think mostly because we were living off the subs soil moisture that we put in, in, in 2018 and 2019.

But then, That two and three year average started to go down, and now we're almost a little bit the other way, where our 12 month average is actually close to average. But the 36 month average is by far the lowest it's ever been since we've, I think we've got 25 years of data in this. And that 36 month average is still by eight inches lower than, it's ever been.

So [00:45:00] we still feel like we're just completely hand to mouth even if we have an above average year. I think it, just takes a while to turn that ship around. And that's all just factors that go into trying to figure this all out. Just a lot to it.

I have a question for all of you guys. It's a little bit not so detailed. Little, bigger picture. It's as I listen to all of you the remarkable amount of moving parts that everybody is playing with in the present moment and historically their experience and everything, and we talk about regenerative agriculture and resilience, and we often think we're actually trying to make our land more resilient or more regenerative.

As I listen to you guys and, knowing how people's production has really been quite volatile over the last two or three years, at least in our part of the world, my question to you, do you think your [00:46:00] resilience is your experience or your land is, it what's in your head and what you practiced or is it what you actually think you're doing to your ground?

I don't know that it's an either or a bill. I think resilience, and I know Andrew and I have talked about this quite a bit too, but resiliency is multi-layered. So it's, your I mean it's all your resources. It's your ecological resources, it's your human resources it's your financial resources.

It's just this whole package that everybody's situation is completely unique and I think some good introspection with everybody with, all of our businesses to see where maybe the weak spots of our resiliency is. And I think that can help as we move forward.

But I. I think it's all of it. That's, part of we talk about regenerative agriculture, but holistic [00:47:00] management is, it's all of those pieces. And I think that all if we're working on all, of those factors, I think that's going to increase our resiliency. Yeah, I'd love, to hear from the others. That was a great, response. Curious how you experienced doing this? I I, agree with Wyatt. I, think that there's a lot of things in play. But I'm not sure our experience versus the land. I think it's all such a small piece of time.

That, we're affecting it. Honestly I, think that the actual resilience to most of these landscapes is way bigger than, we are so that we can certainly play with it. We can make mistakes. And I think overall, and my judgment is just to try to enhance that and not try to make that balance to the positive [00:48:00] and, not too much to the negative.

And that I think there's, without a doubt in my mind at least that one of the, one of the principles, which is the rest, is that then, but then you gotta balance all the economic and all the other things that lead to resiliency that Wyatt was talking about. But to me, ha, the bigger of a buffer you can build of a forage buffer.

Leads towards more resilience in the land from all factors, whether that's precipitation markets or whatever. Because anytime you have extra forage, it's very marketable at least in today's market. So I don't see that as too big of a limiting factor because forage is very remarkable. And I we try to have a pretty good substantial buffer.

Thanks.

I guess for us it's [00:49:00] Bill, looking at it is, I think we're short on the experience end of things here. Because we're first generation, first time doing this, first time, all this. And so our experience is really limited in, what we're doing. And I guess, to be honest with you, I don't think we have any resilience.

Resilience. We're trying to develop that, we're trying to build that here and we're trying to do that through the experience of listen to folks that have been there, done that. But when I think we don't have any of that built in is I think it comes down to the economics of it, first and foremost for us.

Cuz one guy told me that we leased from, we gave him a good pre presentation and had a great mission and all that. And he said, told me four words and he goes, no margin, no mission. So no matter [00:50:00] how hard, no matter what we wanna do good with the land or how hard or what or yeah. No matter what good we want to do, we can't do it unless we make some money at it while we're doing it.

And so that is definitely a piece of the resiliency that we have to build in and by. We haven't dialed that by far. We have not. I don't think we've dialed the resiliency in this land at all. We're pretty reactionary to what's happening, and maybe that'll be that way the rest of our lives. And that's where the deal we did with Natalie today and that she's built the Excel spreadsheet for the first time.

I'll feel more proactive than I've ever been on this deal. And then, like a buffer of forage, we we rest parts of the place every year trying to be the best stewards of the land, but, That isn't a, we don't have any buffer of forage either. [00:51:00] The only buffer we have is the a amount, the animals that we can sell and market.

Pretty much is all we have. But then that always comes back to the economics of it. I don't know if that answers your question or not, cuz it's pretty much clueless i, and I would a, I definitely agree with all that and what everyone has said, but like to me, the little tiny things that we can do that makes me feel like I am contributing to some resiliency of the land is like fencing out the cattails, like for the black birds or fencing out this riparian area so the cows don't muck it all up.

Or just doing little, things like that I think do have a, visible effect and. Maybe, I guess stacked up might have a bigger effect in the long run.

Yeah. Thanks everyone. [00:52:00] And, part I wouldn't sell yourself short. I think we're all and I think sometimes to me just being able to participate in a bull session and share the experience of multiple people, it's about that probably the most useful investment of time that one can make.

Cuz none of us can experience all these things at the same time at the same place. But yeah. Good stuff. Good to know. It's not easy.

All I, certainly agree with Natalie and I, believe that the small things. Are just as what you're saying are small things. Natalie I, think our experience says that we thought they were small things. They're not small things. They're very important things. And without a doubt there's a compounding effect that those have [00:53:00] and, lays the groundwork basically for a, bit of a mindset is in preserving some of that, some of those ecological things that you can build on.

So I, think in a way that is a buffer in and of itself, just the fact that you're doing those things and I wouldn't, I certainly wouldn't underestimate it. And however small it seems on a certain day There is a compounding effect.

I'm, in the background here, but Roger and, everyone, can you talk about what you do when, like, when part went through the season and you realize, hey you, way over overestimated. Just what your, what are your first steps? What do, you think about or what do you do?

Does [00:54:00] that make sense that I'm asking? Oh, Ted. How many animals you could run or, what your forage production was, so that, or what you thought it was gonna be that year, that process

for us. We'll, if that's case, like if we hit July and we're burning through grass way faster than we thought at that point in time it, becomes the market and the way the market's going right now, the first thing we would look at is our yearlings. That's our, and I mean it's your drought plan. Our yearlings are our drought plan.

And those, like last year we sold part of them just because by the time we hit this time of year, we already knew we were in trouble. And so if our estimates are gone Natalie will put up a red flag and say, We're not hitting our adas like we thought we're, way ahead, we're, and that [00:55:00] we'll look at or way behind.

We'll, whichever way, I don't know. We'll we'll market those year ends, I guess at that point in time. That'd be the first thing we'd do. The other thing we'd con look at considering is if pairs are going through for a bunch more money, we'd look at culling our mama herd and potentially selling pairs that don't fit.

I think that's a really good point, Barb. I think you I guess what we do is we start looking at we need to have less cattle. You, just try to figure out which whether you have pasture cattle that you've brought in that maybe you can talk to the cattle owner and see if they can go somewhere else, or you have yearlings.

Or cows. But to Bart's point, really looking at the market and we, have this paradigm that, yeah, our yearlings are our drought buffer, but there are times that maybe it makes more sense to sell, the cow [00:56:00] depending on what their value is relative to the market. I don't here for the next year or so, or two or three, I don't know how long but that's definitely gonna be a consideration.

I think these cow values are gonna get very high. Now, whether they're overvalued or not is a tricky one to figure out. But yeah that's, a good point.

No, it might be a function of. Of what kind of business you're in. Partially because for us, the cowherd on a seed stock operation seems like it hurts a lot to try to, sell a cowherd, but there certainly is replacement heifers and those kind of things that we can do things with. We could haul bulls to a grow yard or something.

So we have a couple options that way. But the very first place I would look and our operation has a, fair percentage of flood irrigated grazing [00:57:00] land. And so I might go to that grazing plan and say, I had anticipated on each graze that I was doing 30% consumption, 33% consumption, and 33% trampling, and 33% standing.

So I might say what, if I take all those acres and increase that utilization to 60%? How far does that get me? Because I think the resilience of the land on the irrigated ground now, at least that's maybe gives you a one year buy possibly. And if you have good, steady irrigation water, I think that's a fairly substantial buffer that is built in beyond precipitation and beyond.

So it, I guess it depends on the whole mix, I guess is what I'm saying and what the main part of the business is. Is it moves your [00:58:00] priorities as to where you think you might, make up that difference. Yeah. Thanks everybody.

Hey, I got a question. So my wife and I, we don't own any hay equipment. We live in southwest North Dakota. We are pretty new to the grazing game. The best we've done is only fed hay for two months. This last winter's kind of wrecked us pretty hard on that, but is there amount of hay that you guys figure on keeping around the place?

When we're purchasing hay, I guess every year we're just trying to figure out is there a sweet spot in there where we're not overcommitting ourself to, all this capital that we would invest in hay versus having to buy it. Last minute when the markets rally and it's, just something we've really been trying to pencil in, I guess if you guys had any thoughts on that.

Yeah, Sean I, guess I'll, tell you what we do.[00:59:00] So when we wean calves, we're gonna assume that we're gonna have to feed those calves that, that our stock piled forage probably isn't good enough for them for, a while till we get green grass. And we're gonna wean calves somewhere in January, probably around the end of January, calving in May.

But we're gonna figure on higher quality hay to buy for those calves or to have around for those calves that can be buffered to some degree with, some cake or some other kind of feed as well. But you're still gonna provide for those calves until they get to. A green forage or a good growing forage.

I don't think there's any way really around that. you, I don't imagine wheat grow enough or have enough quality, enough shock pile forage at that time of year to really provide for them. Then when you get to the cow herd, [01:00:00] we figure that we need to plan to feed for one month, which would be probably January.

While the calves are on those cows, we, if we get very much weather, we may very well need to feed for that. So that's say 30 days at 30 pounds. If we know we have the stock plow forage, if we know we have the stock plow forage and then It after that, if it's just winter weather events in Jan in February, March and April I would estimate another as far as a, buffer I'd like to have on hand would be another month, three weeks to a month, which still at 30 pounds per head per day.

But the good thing about that is that can be equal to the quality of your standing forage or of your stockpile forage. In other words, really poor hay. You want it poor [01:01:00] enough to where they really want to go graze when you feed them. And so you can buy that a lot more economically, whether that's straw that you put some lumix on or there's lots of options to, mitigate that and keep that as a cheaper buffer.

But I don't see a way to cut the corner for the qual forage quality on the weaned calves.

I don't, I think this number comes close to what Roger's saying, but, and I haven't figured it up this year cause I'm not sure we're quite done. But since we've moved to the spring calving, the May calving we've been in that instead of figuring two ton per head per year, it's been a lot closer to three quarters of a ton.

And as I was listening to your numbers, Roger, I think that's pretty close to where, maybe where you're landing, right? Yep. Pretty close, but, and we've drastically de decreased the amount of hay we've put up. So what is there for the cows [01:02:00] is generally pretty decent hay. And so it's more of a supplement to whatever they're out there picking up and they've, I guess they just get used to, this is what you're getting, you better go find the rest.

But if, they can get a little protein boost out of what I take them, then they can go out and pick up whatever. But like you say, you can, whether it's straw and lu mix or distillers grains or cake cake, whatever it is to give them that, that little bit of protein boost so they can go and utilize that, rough feed.

We do pretty similar. Roughly would like to have three or four weeks of, hay on hand that's designated for cows. One ranch that's just strictly a cow calf operation that's might be cutting it a little close and putting ourselves at risk of. What you were talking about, Sean, as far as needing to buy [01:03:00] hay, when demand for hay is high and supply is low and that's, that, that gets pretty expensive.

But like on our ranch here in Melville we're always gonna have hay and we're pretty much always gonna be feeding hay to something. So the way we get around that is if we feed more. And, so because we know that we're just trying to get the best buy we can. So we're sometime we're for, sometimes we're forward contracting it, other times we're leaving ourselves open to the market a little bit.

But then all we do is just depending on the conditions, we're just adjusting what, class we're feeding that to. So like this year for example, we we shipped some calves to a Growy yard and, fed more of that hay to those cows. So we didn't actually end up buying any, more hay this year.

And so we didn't. We didn't have to expose ourselves to that market short term blip. But we did have to buy more feed for calves that we weren't planning on so that [01:04:00] there's still a cost there.

Our goal is to feed for two months. We missed that mark big time this year. One of the things we did for the first time and was cuz what we do is we buy, we try to buy real high quality alfalfa and then use that as our protein supplement on stockpiled forage. And so what we ended up having this year was we were feeding really high quality alfalfa full feed to these cows.

Forever. And so we ended up buying some straw from, outta Washington and feeding that. And it seemed like it made the cows happier. But we, I talked to a guy that was feeding straw and gave me an idea on that. But if anybody has more ideas on, [01:05:00] alternative feed source or feed stuff, because we don't put up any hay, we buy it all.

So it's a, it comes down to us. It's just a pure financial deal. It's like we know how much money we have to buy hay based on the number of cows and based on how much we're planning on. And if we don't hit that mark, it cuts into next year's money is the way it is. So alternative feed stuff and we can't feed any grains, or we gotta stay away from sugars and all that based on the way we sell our cows.

Thank you, judge.

We do feed, quite a bit of hay of cows and that's a lot of times that's what we have on hand for, them if we know we've got some set aside just for them. And we'll supplement that with with Cake. And I've gotten by would say pretty well with that.

You guys all lease ground,[01:06:00] all of you? Do you ever lease more than you think you'll need? It's stock polling straw or whatever that it seems like none of our ranches are really whole in themselves. We all seem to require some partnership on something. But do you ever, can you ever play with just making sure you have outlets to I mean tie up grass that maybe you won't need?

Maybe you will.

We have the opportunity potentially to do that right now, bill, and the first thing in my mind goes is how can I make money off that and put cows on it? And what you're saying is maybe the best way to make money on that is to not put anything on it or put something on it and save my stuff here. Is that what you're getting at?

You're basically, you're putting a price on every one of you relies at some level on [01:07:00] some type of stock pile feed. And Then you put a price on a variety of things that could create stockpiled opportunities that you could actually use and protect the stuff you know you have at home.

So you might say, yeah, I'm gonna go here knowing that I can come back here and, but oh, maybe I don't need it. But then it seems like we're never in a situation by having a little extra stockpile feed at a home never becomes a liability

because stockpile feed, even if it's not grazed well, you can't un graze it for too long, but you just grow more feed under stockpile feed just as a matter of course. So sometimes when you have more, it can really grow feed in a dry situation. We experienced that in the last couple years, but I don't, I'm just curious because you all are, many of us and you guys in particular are all trying to secure grass somewhere [01:08:00] else.

And I'm just curious if you ever think find people that you can secure grass and, save your own. It, it might not work. It might not, versus buying hay or buying straw or stuff like that.

Always just trying to try to build a little bit of margin into it and try to be able to do that economically. There's just this trade off how much hay do you want to have on hand, so if we figure that we're gonna try to have we're gonna lease this ranch and we're gonna try to have 14 months worth of grass plus a month worth of hay, then yeah, we're essentially leasing more land than we need.

Because we've got that, we've got a grazing plan that. Can take us through 12 months of grazing out if conditions allow. But we've also got a month of hay sitting on hand and we've intentionally tried to build [01:09:00] in maybe another 20% of margin just in case we're missing the mark with, our grazing planning.

I think that's whether you're buying hay that you might not feed or you're leasing grass that you might not have to use. It's all just building margin one way or the other. It seems seems like you can talk about building margin. The price of that lease gets cheap when you realize that you're stockpiling $250 feed, that you don't have to go out and buy and unroll at home.

And I, don't think, I doubt there's anybody here that has a problem with that math. It's more about the supply of the lease ground than anything.

I think that's right. I think that comes into play too. And we've certainly lease ground that we did not need for the cattle we had on hand that day. But we've also leased ground that we ended up paying basically that whatever we [01:10:00] estimated the stockpiled potential of that ground we just used the price of hay and all of a sudden that, pushes that market a little bit higher because if, you're looking at least in the ground and for summer grass Versus winter grass.

If you did the math on what a cow eats per day and divided that by 250 or $300 a ton, and told somebody you had a lot of summer grass, that you'd tell 'em for a hundred dollars a month, summer or winter they're, gonna laugh at you. But if you tell 'em you're gonna get $250 a ton for hay, they buy it.

So yeah, we've done different assortments of that and I think depending on where it's at, sometimes geographical separation is a good thing.

So [01:11:00] I wanna thank all my speakers tonight. Wyatt, I do apologize. You, give an inch boy and I'm gonna take a mile. You just gotta remember that next time. But I do appreciate you all coming on and this has been really good. I've, loved the back and forth banter and the questions and so we'll definitely resume this next fall.

So I appreciate you all for tuning in.

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