

Brown County

Rotational Grazing Affords Easy Profits, Less Work.



“I was doing a lot of work for nothing,” explains Tom Krueger, landowner of 155 acres in Denmark, Wis. In 1990, Tom and his family moved back to the family farm, and started raising some beef cattle and a few cash crops. Both he and his wife worked off the farm for a living, but Tom had an itch to continue running the land he had grown up operating with his Dad and brother.

In a fall 2016 visit with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Tom sat at his kitchen table overlooking a newly established pasture stretching out to the edge of his farm’s wood line. “A big 11 point buck keeps coming out right at that low spot every night,” Tom said grinning. More than just a deer hunter, Tom paged through his book on wild mushrooms with intent of going back out that afternoon to harvest some edibles. It’s easy to understand why Tom is in love with his property. Tom’s land is a mix of upland prime agriculture, lowland wetlands and ponds, cool hemlock draws with meandering creeks, and an old gravel quarry restored with pine plantings. It has many seasons of memories for his family. Even though a local company looking to expand a waste digester facility has offered him a generous price for his property, he can’t stomach the thought of seeing any bit of it destroyed.

Since 1990, his beef cattle were raised in a lot at his brother’s place down the road. When asked if he’s noticed any change in workload since converting to a rotational grazing system for his beef herd, he scoffed in bewilderment. “It’s like the cattle aren’t even out there,” Tom said. “I’ve spent 15 minutes feeding them in a week!” Tom’s prior routine raising cattle on a lot required a minimum of a half hour feeding time every day. Cutting costs and time on equipment maintenance, such as a silo unloader and manure spreader, is a big plus. With this change alone, Tom said he and his wife are 100% on board with grazing.

The Kruegers have roughly 55 acres in permanent pasture. Around 35 of these acres were formerly cash crop. Tom sees no sacrifice here either, saving two weeks a year picking stones, slashing costs of fertilizer and saving time by not having to fix parts on old equipment.

In fall 2015, Tom came into the NRCS office initially interested in starting to graze some of his idle ground. That conversation about rotational grazing triggered his curiosity. Tom did what not all people do, he got educated. He took it upon himself to attend multiple pasture walks and even the Wis. Grassworks



Tom Krueger, of Denmark, Wis., with his herd of Herefords enjoying their new lifestyle on pasture.

Grazing Conference. It was here that Tom had his light bulb moment, “hearing that soils guy (Ray Archuletta) talk about how grazing was like farming with nature just made it all click for me,” Tom confessed.

In summer 2016, with financial assistance from the NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Tom was able set up the entire infrastructure of fence and water for his pasture system. Keeping things low maintenance, he already has plans for pre-placed hay bales allowing him to outfeed on pasture all winter.

Tom currently has 15 Hereford cows, with plans to expand to 20 cow/calf pairs. When asked about how he plans to market, it turns out, the market found him. A buyer looking for grass fed meat came to him and walked over his operation. For now, he plans to sell to a meat shop in Milwaukee. With no official grass fed certification, they offer 40 cents per pound more than conventional beef and he doesn’t have transport costs.

A couple years into retirement, this low maintenance farming lifestyle has promising prospects for Tom, affording him time to pursue his many other hobbies. Rolling through his pastures on the four wheeler, he looked at the ripe and full apple trees sculpting the edge of the woods. “I made a great pie with the soft ones last week,” Tom said.