

UTAH Conservation SHOWCASE



Farmer develops small pasture system after attending NRCS pasture school

Darrell Yardley is a well-known cattle rancher in the scenic southern Utah farming community of Beaver. His 200 head cow/calf operation utilizes more than 200 acres of nearby rangeland and 23 acres of irrigated pastureland in the lush Beaver valley. He often harvests a good hay crop from the irrigated pastures—especially during drought years when alfalfa production is down.

Yardley, who is a retired educator, learned of a local pasture school conducted by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and jumped at the opportunity to go back to school. The knowledge he gained from the school and other local range professionals, led him to segment his 23 acres into four separate pastures, using a single strand electric fence.

The 68 cows and calves are left on a single parcel for approximately two weeks before he rotates the livestock out to the next pasture. The purpose he explains is to graze the grass down to about four inches of stubble height. At that point the grasses will be rested and will regenerate to twice the height in a short amount of time. He adds a little fertilizer in late July to stimulate late summer growth.

Grazing Principles

NRCS State Range Conservationist Shane Green, who often teaches at these schools,



Beaver Rancher Darrell Yardley surveys forage growth on irrigated pastures he has sectioned off for intensive, rotational grazing.

suggests ranchers pay attention to the following basic small pasture management principles:

- Intensity of use
- Frequency of use
- Duration of use
- Timing or season of use

This helps with rotational grazing, increases productivity and improves soil health.

Yardley explains it this way. “The cows have been eating the nice tender grass and leaving the old stuff. Eventually, the cows have to eat all the old stuff and it all becomes tender stuff. It ends up working out for the cows in the end,” he added. “I am really sold on the system. If you want to get more out of your pasture, this is the way to do it.”