PROFILES IN soil health

Mr. Doug Beaton
Paauilo, Hawaii
268 acres
Operation: cattle, sheep, and horses
Practice: rotational grazing

Local Rancher Steward of Soil Health

Doug Beaton and his family are ranching on 268 acres in Paauilo, Hawaii with 22 cattle, 60 sheep, and 8 horses. For the Beaton's, soil is the beginning to healthy grass. "As ranchers, we have to realize that we are grass farmers first," said Doug Beaton. He says that their grazing management considers the soil and grass first. Once they followed that, their animals were healthy because there was a lot of feed available. As a result, their grass-finished animals finished faster and the animals are younger when processed.

> *"We always try to be good to our land and take care of it. Thinking about our soil first, that just helped everything grow better."*
>
> *- Doug Beaton, rancher*

Making the Change

So what is soil health? This rancher says it's not difficult to achieve. It's pretty simple. The soil used to be healthy once before when we weren't impacting the environment. It's not a hard thing to grasp. "We tried to learn a little about soil health before we got involved so there was no reluctancy to getting started," said Doug Beaton. It's just a matter of changing the management practices.

The Practices

At Puuwai Ranch, the core practice that led to soil health was rotational grazing. This allows grasses to rest and get re-established. By keeping the

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grass at a reasonable height, it protected the soil from eroding away. In addition, rotational grazing helped to minimize soil compaction and contributes to diversity in the pasture forage. According to Doug Beaton, the most satisfying result of having soil health is having enough grass to feed their animals and not having to purchase supplemental food.

Ranching for Health

Puuwai Ranch is getting technical assistance from the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). "They come out to check, make suggestions, take a look at what you're doing and pass the information to someone else, making a nice circle so that everyone benefits from each other," said Doug Beaton.

In Hawaii, the cost to drill at 3,200 feet is about $1.5 million and the State of Hawaii owns all the water so the ranch would need to get a permit. As such, they rely on catchment water and being able to store that water over time. NRCS helped to establish water storage for the livestock by catching water off of a barn. From the catchment, the ranch was able to put in four water troughs. The heavy use area protection at each trough stopped erosion and is holding up very well. NRCS also helped with cross fencing, which improved the grass by rotating the cattle and sheep. "That really helped to improve our grass and our bottom line," said Doug Beaton.

With soil health, Puuwai Ranch noticed a difference in both quantity and quality of their product. For Doug Beaton, soil health in one word is "profit."

Catchment system makes water available to livestock.

"Once you take care of the soils and the grasses, profit rolls in a lot easier," he continued. Soil Health is a lot like land stewardship. If you help better your land and the land around you, you also encourage more people to get involved. In return, our environment stays healthier, longer.

People should implement soil health practices because it could increase their bottom line. It's not that much change in effort.

Contact

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