



Grazier's Toolbox and Seed Drill Demonstrations: Hands-On Forage Management Workshops

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Grazier (noun)

A person who grazes cattle.

Introduction

During 2021, three Grazier's Toolbox and Seed Drill Demonstration Workshops were held in Northwest Alabama. A "grazier" is defined as someone who grazes or feeds cattle for the market. This word highlighted the goal of the program, which was to improve the grazing management skillset of beef cattle producers, thus making them more efficient "graziers". Program objectives included educating beef cattle producers regarding methods to estimate available forage mass, equipment to aid in forage establishment, and tools contributing to improved grazing efficiency. The Colbert, Fayette, and Winston County Extension Offices and Regional Extension Agent, Paul Vining organized and implemented these hands-on grazing management workshops. Each program was held at a beef cattle producer's operation. Program events included a classroom style PowerPoint presentation followed by a hands-on forage workshop that utilized grazing sticks and worksheets to estimate available forage mass. Annual ryegrass was the featured forage at each workshop. However, multiple forage species were discussed at each event. Equipment demonstrations varied at each location but included physically rotating cattle to a new paddock using a temporary electric fence, a haylage wrapping demonstration, and two seed drill demonstrations. Program participants had the opportunity to increase practical skills that allowed them to become more efficient and effective "graziers".



Extension agent Zack Brannon provides instruction on using a no-till seed drill.

Workshop held in Addison, Alabama in April 2021.

Goal

To provide hands-on forage management training to beef cattle producers, allowing for improved grazing efficiency. Grazing efficiency is defined as utilizing the optimal amount of available forage while maintaining forage productivity.



Objectives

- 1) To provide education to beef cattle producers regarding methods to estimate available forage mass.
- 2) To provide instruction regarding available equipment to aid in forage establishment.
- 3) To demonstrate the effectiveness and convenience of tools that contribute to improved grazing efficiency.



Workshop participants use grazing sticks and worksheets to measure and record forage height.

Workshop held in Addison, Alabama in April 2021.

Materials and Methods

Available Forage Mass Estimation

Grazing sticks and forage mass estimation worksheets were distributed to each program participant. A grazing stick is a 36-inch measuring stick that provides a detailed estimate of the available forage mass expressed in available pounds of forage dry matter per inch of forage height on a per acre basis. Worksheets were used in conjunction with grazing sticks. The worksheets contained formulas used to estimate forage mass availability and the amount of forage cattle would consume daily. By understanding these two variables cattle producers could make decisions about the proper time to rotate cattle and allow for forage regrowth and pasture recovery.



Calibrating and Using a No-Till Seed Drill

Methods of forage establishment were discussed at each workshop. Two workshops featured no-till seed drills. Instruction for using and calibrating these machines was provided. These no-till seed drills are available for rent via the soil and water board in of the counties that hosted workshops.

Temporary Electric Fencing and Rotational Grazing Strategies.

At each workshop temporary fencing and rotational grazing methods were emphasized. During one workshop participants physically moved temporary fence posts and electric wire, allowing cattle to graze a fresh paddock.

Impact

- **64** Alabama beef cattle producers attended these workshops.
- **100%** of program attendees found the information presented useful and applicable to their operation.
- Survey responses indicated an **increase in knowledge** regarding optimizing forage utilization and seed drill operation and availability.
- Attendees assigned an estimated positive economic impact that totaled **\$50,000** and averaged **\$4,375** per response.
- Knowledge gained from these workshops impacted a total of **2,973 acres** and **2,186 head of livestock**.



Regional Extension Agent, Paul Vining explains the intricacies of developing a grazing system.

Workshop held in Fayette, Alabama in November 2021.

Cooperating Organizations

- Alabama Cattlemen's Association
- Colbert County Cattlemen's Association
- Colbert County Natural Resource Conservation Service
- Winston County Farmers Federation
- Winston County Young Farmers
- Winston County Natural Resource Conservation Service



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