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Experts encourage increased forage use to boost cattle profits

by **Frank J. Buchman**

Greater forage utilization is one way to help combat constantly increasing expenditures for cattlemen.

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Coordinated by Todd Whitney, agronomy specialist for the River Valley Extension District, with cooperation from several other ag agencies, the Grazingland Workshop stressed cost-cutting suggestions for cattlemen.

"Higher fuel and fertilizer costs, along with other continually increased expenses on the ranch, demand that cattlemen look at every alternative to hold their outputs down," emphasized Bill Phillips, research animal scientist at the Grazinglands Research Laboratory near El Reno, Okla.

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cow-calf operation is one method to expand profit potential in the cattle business here.

"However, transportation costs to import needed supplies are sometimes a deterring factor," Phillips clarified. "Therefore, it's often more feasible to ship cattle in at lighter weights, because more can be loaded on the trucks."

Hay, as a key ingredient in starter diets for stockers, is also an ever-increasing production component. "Expansion of both large dairies and bio-fuel production in the area creates competition for hay," Phillips warned.

Thus, increased use of all forages was recommended. "It costs a lot to make grass into hay," Phillips calculated. "There is added management required to graze the forage, but it generally requires lower inputs overall, especially considering high fuel and labor costs."

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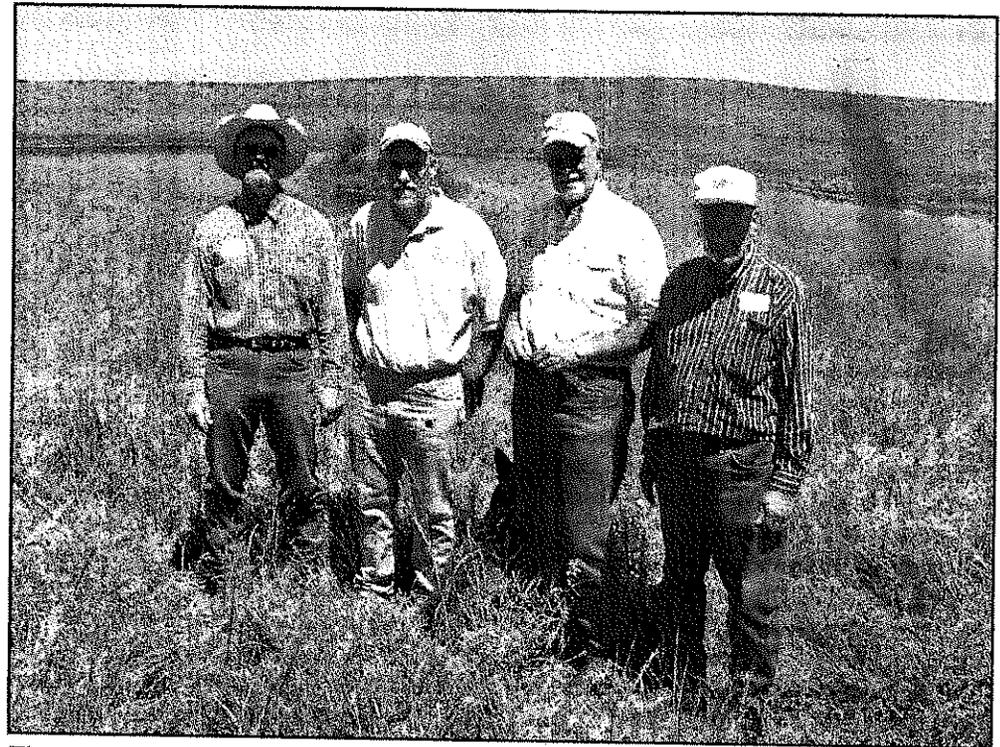
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Native grasslands can be used with a variety of other forages in year-round grazing rotation programs, explained Brian Northup, research ecologist from the El Reno lab. Considerable data was presented utilizing various crops, but research with wheat grazing has often shown to be cost-effective.

"Of course, when wheat is \$10, farmers sometimes don't feel like they can jeopardize their yield potential by grazing," Northup admitted.

However, his studies indicate that wheat grain yields are not affected when cattle are removed by March 1. "My philosophy has still always been, if it doesn't make money why do it?" added Northup.

Yet, in most cases stockers grazing on wheat pasture can gain two to three pounds daily. "Nitrogen fertilizer has doubled in cost, and is essential for a grain crop, so why not get more use out of your program by grazing the



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"Cows require less feed when calving in March and April, rather than having calves earlier," he analyzed. "Although calves weaned at four months of age in late summer instead of the fall will weigh less, they can do well on their own. This fur-

wheat, too, even if it takes some additional management?" Northup questioned.

Additional perennial and annual forages can supplement native and wheat grazing. Wheatgrass, fescue, lespedeza, brome, sudan, triticale and rye were mentioned as suitable complementary pastures.

"Depending on the location, and of course weather conditions, these grasses can work well in rotation programs," Northup advised.

He cautioned that planting and fertilizer costs must be figured carefully before incorporating forages into a cattle operation. "Some of the perennials require a year of deferment, or they will be killed out," Northup confirmed. "However, our work indicates they will still be profitable in a seven-year production life.

"Perennial grasses are cheaper to grow than wheat," he credited.

Although considerable work has been done with fescue, Northup advised that extra management is essential. "There can be problems if fescue is not intensely grazed before it becomes too rank and hazardous to cattle," he stated. "I always used cattle-friendly, endophyte-free fescue."

Early intensive grazing of native pastures has been proven cost-effective in all work done by Northup. Twice the number of cattle are placed on an acreage when the protein level is the highest, and then taken off at one-half the traditional grazing period.

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Certain broadleaf weeds are palatable and nutritious for cattle, according to Northup when questioned about destroying intruders on seeded forages. "I'd rather graze cattle than use a herbicide or mower," he qualified.

Host Gordon Morrison described how the nearby pond was filled by drainage from four sections of grassland, and cattle grazing those acreages could water from it if necessary.

"Soil and water conservation specialists were concerned that there would be too much flow into the pond. However, runoff goes into three other ponds before it reaches here, so that's not a problem," commented Morrison.

With three surface acres of water, the pond has an island in the center. "I wanted the entire pond to be at least 12 feet deep, so I had the soil piled in the center, and people can fish or hunt ducks and geese from there," Morrison informed.

Completed four years ago, the pond was stocked with fish when water supply was adequate. "It already has some very nice bass, as well as bluegill for their feed supply, along with catfish. We catch and release the bass, so they'll continue to grow," Morrison said.

The retreat area was described by Morrison as a "dream campsite." Downed timber was removed, picnic

nearby have been cleared where campers can pitch tents. A mobile home and a portable outhouse were on location.

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May Morrison and a group of neighbors prepared and served the picnic dinner, sponsored by Crossroads Resource, Conservation and Development and the Cloud County Conservation District.

Those in attendance moved out into the waist-high native pasture overlooking the pond as Dwayne Rice, state rangeland management specialist for the Kansas Natural Resources Conservation Service from Lincoln, identified native grass varieties.

Of the 18 grass varieties in the area, Rice indicated that Indiangrass, Big Bluestem, Switchgrass, Eastern Gamagrass and Little Bluestem are the most prominent and important. "Three pages" of forbs have been identified.

"These are not all bad," Rice revealed. "Actually, cattle like and do well on many broadleaf species. About 30 percent of their diet is forbs." Complete eradication, through herbicides or other means, was discouraged, because it upsets the natural prairie ecosystem.

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levels during early growth. "Resting a pasture every three to five years will build up its quality, too," he alerted.

Importance of reliable clean water was stressed by Rice. "Most people don't realize that a cow needs 12 gallons of water a day; and if the grass is dry, they can consume 18 gallons a day," he quoted.

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Continued from page 1

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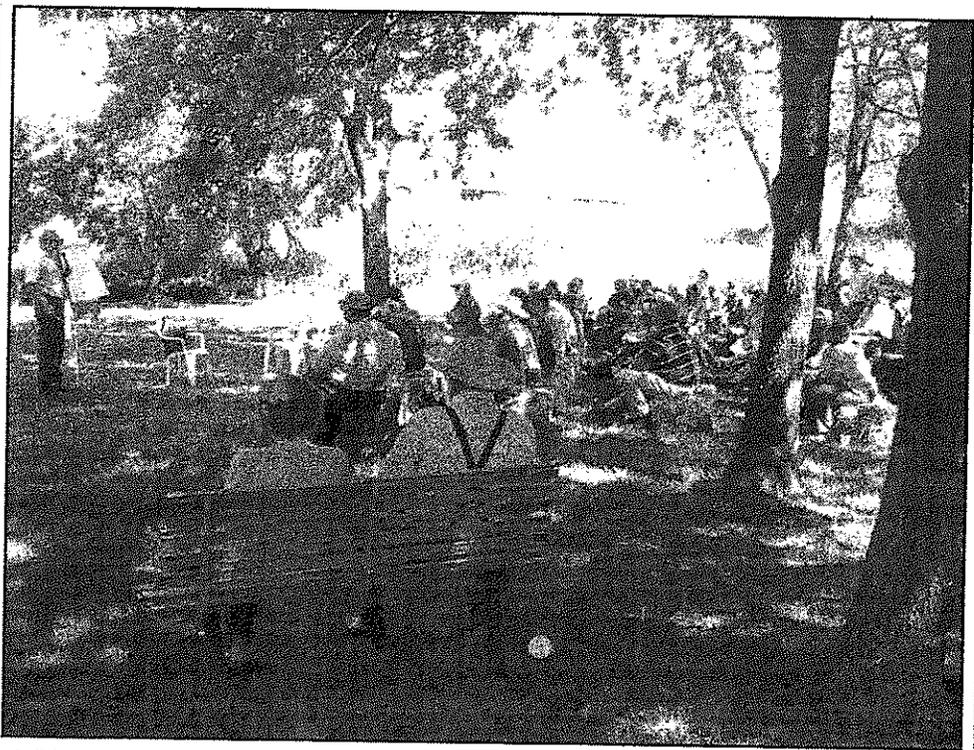
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As the activities concluded, several stayed to fish in the pond, and others drove to the nearby wind farm. "I have been watching the construction from my house," Morrison relayed. "We are too close to the radio towers for it to be

built here, but three miles over 24 towers are being built."

Recognizing that some landowners and certain areas are against installation of wind turbines, Morrison professed, "Cloud County has been very receptive. The project has been helping the locale financially, and we expect it to continue in future years."



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Expanded Forage Use Urged To Up Cattle Profitability

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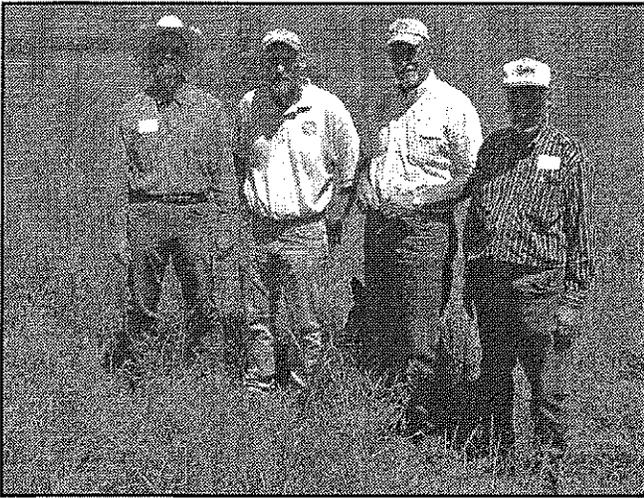
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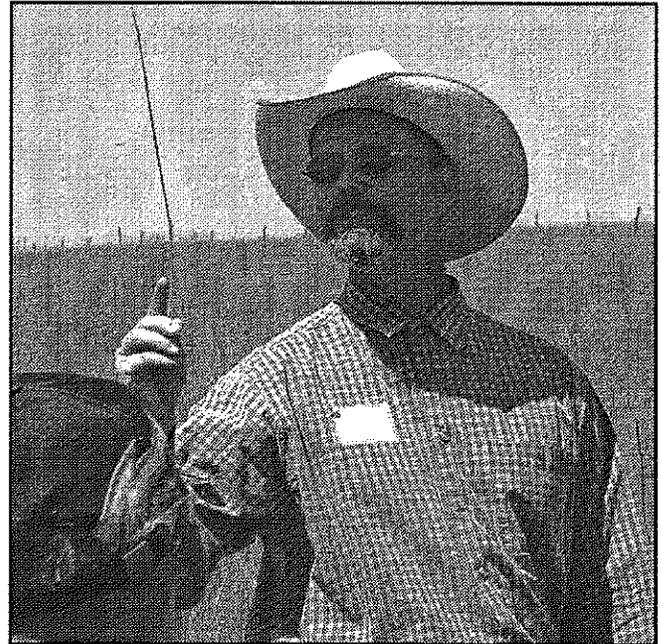
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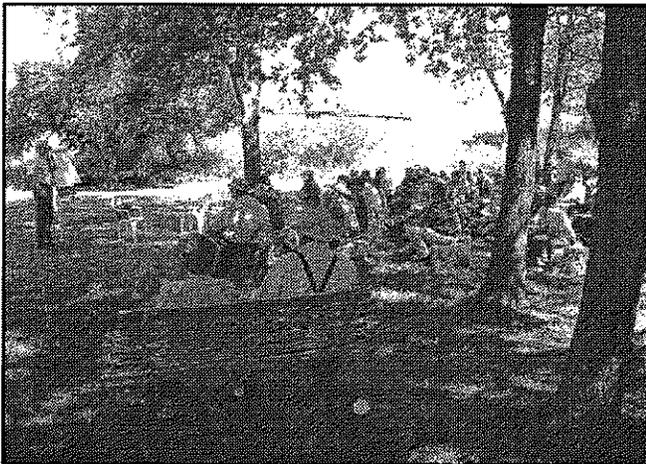
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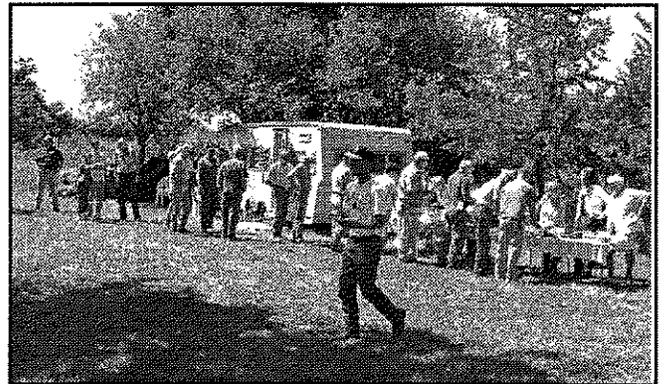
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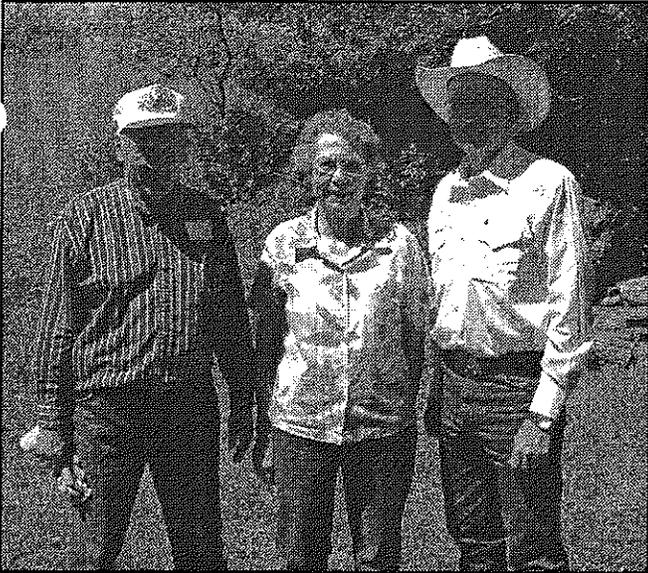
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Dinner is always an anticipated time, as was the case when May Morrison and neighbor ladies put out the fare for cattlemen attending the Grazingland Workshop hosted on the Morrison ranch near Concordia.



It was a busy day for Gordon and May Morrison, but they had time to visit with their neighbor, rancher Jim Farney before dinner at the Grazingland Workshop on the Morrison ranch near Concordia. A diverse farmer-rancher with operations originally in Illinois and now in Kansas and Colorado, Farney sketched the artwork for Morrison's book, *Views from the Learning Post*.



Tall, lush, green native prairie overlooking a five-acre pond on the Gordon and May Morrison ranch south of Concordia was the outdoor classroom for those attending a recent Grazingland Workshop. Four sections of grassland drain to the pond built four years ago and already yielding large bigger-than-frying-pan bass. Ample bluegill numbers provide ready feed supply, and it remains a catch and release fishing hole, so many trophy catches are hoped for in the future.