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**Ag. News**

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**Grazing Management**

More than half the population of Texas lives in the urban centers, yet many yearn to return to a somewhat rural lifestyle. Almost every city and town in Texas including the towns in Wise County is surrounded by small acreage tracts of land (5 to 100 acres) owned by individuals who work in the city but use their land as their principal or weekend residence. Collectively, these small acreage landowners own hundreds of thousands of acres of forest land, pastureland and rangeland in Texas. Unfortunately, small acreage tracts can be easily abused if not managed properly.

The number one abuse of these small acreage tracts in Wise County is overgrazing. Properly grazed acreages are more stable and experience less soil loss from erosion. Most livestock are grazed all year long or continuously on these small tracts which results in more bare ground, poor quality grasses and invasion of less desirable plants. These improperly managed acreages can indirectly cause contamination of water by damaging vegetation to the extent that erosion takes place. This can allow non-point source pollution to enter streams and waterways adjacent to the mis-managed tracts.

It has been my observation that most small acreage landowners have little understanding of just how much forage livestock need to survive each month and each year. Forage is what an animal consumes by grazing. Feed is what you supply in the form of hay or supplement. Forage production is measured in pounds per acre or in animal unit months (AUM’s). One AUM is equivalent to the amount of forage consumed by a 1000 pound animal in one month. Most classes of livestock will consume about 3% of their body weight in forage each day if it is available. Therefore one 1000 pound cow will need about 10,000 pounds of forage per year.

There are four main components in a successful grazing program:

1. Eliminate continuous grazing;
2. Divide pastures into smaller units and rotate livestock;
3. Let plants recover before allowing animals to graze it again;
4. Provide a water source in each pasture.

Good grazing management will promote a healthier landscape, happier livestock and provide a more rewarding land ownership experience for the small acreage landowner.