

AFGC 2017 Annual Conference Tour

January 22-24, 2017 in Roanoke, VA / Hosted by the Virginia Forage & Grassland Council

Tour on January 22, 2017

TUCK FARM

A winter grazing program has been an important part of controlling costs and improving profitability at Tuck Farms. Located in Bedford County, VA, Tuck Farms is a mixed beef cattle operation owned and managed by Mr. Keith Tuck, with assistance from his wife and four children. About 1/3 (100 acres) of the 350-acre farm is rented land, and Tuck manages about 100 cow/calf pairs, along with 3 bulls and 15 replacement heifers on a total of about 250 grazeable/hayable acres. However, haying is no longer a part of the



Tuck farm operation as the hay equipment was sold this year.

Rotational stocking and grazing stockpiled forages are the important components of beef cattle management for Tuck. These practices have allowed him to reduce hay feeding by about 1/3 of what he did prior to rotational management, with great savings of labor and resources. The fencing and water infrastructure required for rotational

stocking also have supported better grazing (and nutrient) distribution by the livestock. During the growing season, pasture grazing periods are 5 to 7 days long. Tuck uses strip grazing methods during winter to increase the utilization of stockpiled forages, moving temporary fence about once per week. He also moves the mineral feeder every few days to reduce potential compaction around the feeder.

In a 2013 Country Folks article, Tuck noted “Rotational grazing is simple. The key to it is management. You’ve got to look at yourself not as a cattle producer but a forage producer who markets through cattle. You’re a grass farmer.”

<http://countryfolks.com/keith-tuck-increases-profitability-with-managed-grazing/>

DAWN DAIRY

Dawn Dairy is owned and operated by Mr. Tommy Watson of Bedford, VA. Mr. Watson began managing the farm as a conventional confinement operation but began experimenting with grazing in the late 1980s. Through trial and error (and excellent record keeping), Mr. Watson learned what works for him, developing an 80-acre perennial forage base composed of alfalfa and white clover to supply forage for a 140-cow herd. In late spring these legume-based paddocks are overseeded with annual warm-season grasses such as BMR sorghums, sudan and sudex for summer grazing. Winter mixes typically are some combination of oats, rye, ryegrass, crimson clover and brassicas, with a target of having at least three forage species in a paddock at all times. Watson is able to graze his cows for about 10 months out of the year, and additional haylage and supplements are purchased as needed.



System layout (lanes, permanent and temporary fence, portable water, and housing cattle in a Coverall building to avoid paddock damage during wet conditions) is especially important for forage utilization efficiency. Watson relies on the species diversity, staggered plantings, and grazing management to keep succulent forages in front of his cattle. Improved cow health and longevity have helped Watson double the herd size over the last 20 years.

Eliminating the planting and harvesting equipment needed for corn silage production (in 1992) and using a no-till drill from the local Soil and Water Conservation District also further reduce his capital expenses. As well, he typically can get a good stand of overseeded forages without applying herbicide simply by grazing the canopy tight before seeding.

Excellent forage management, experimenting with new forages and practices, and being willing to be unconventional were all factors in Watson’s being a 2000 VFGC Producer award winner.

For more information on the annual conference and tour visit WWW.AFGC.ORG.

Non-refundable registration fee of \$25 for the tour.