

## **Post Rock Answers**

**Week of: 6/03/18 – 6/07/18**

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**Post Rock District – Livestock**

### **Patience is Key in Strategic Grazing Practices**

Manipulation is often a word used with a negative connotation; however, the art of manipulating cattle to graze an overgrown area or piece of grass that they typically avoid, can be just what the doctor ordered for some pastures. Whether it be the farthest grass from a pasture with a lone pond or a stand of fescue, utilizing these areas can be pivotal in many operations.

Time and time again we drive cattle to a part of the pasture that we want the group to graze, and time and time again they end up right back in the original spot the very next day. Sure, things such as water availability and mineral feeder placement can play a factor, but Bud Williams, one of the most impactful cattle handling experts of our time, was quoted in *Drovers* saying that “Animals stay where they’re comfortable, not where there’s the best feed.” Is it possible that relying on the herding nature and low stress handling could prove to be successful in getting cattle to graze specific sections of grass? Whit Hibbard and Dawn Hnatow shared their expertise with *Drovers* by giving some of the following tips to do just that.

First, minimize force. Many cattle handling experts have stated the concept that cattle will always want to return to wherever it was they came from. This is why S-curve chutes and bud box systems have become so popular as they revolve around that state of mind. It is no different in a wide open patch of grass. If we drive them even semi-aggressively, we will probably get them to the destination but it won’t be long and the group will turn right back around. Next, let the cattle become comfortable. Not only will moving them at their own pace help with this but also allowing them to stop on their own accord, spread out and begin grazing. Finally, give yourself plenty of time to stick around. Hang tight until the entire herd is comfortable and out grazing. Every herd, no matter the size, has the dominant animal. As you read this, I would bet we all have that one boss cow or a certain tag number of a stocker that is always a thorn in your side. That one animal seems to always change the dynamic of the group and when settling the cattle into a new area, it is imperative that all of them are content. We all know that if that one animal decides to head out, the rest of the group will certainly follow suit.

It is always a pretty sight when the herd is spread out, grazing in different directions, paying no mind to one another and no mind to you. Once this occurs, we know the cattle are content and that if one animal starts grazing off in a different direction the rest are not worried enough to follow them. For Post Rock cattlemen reading this article, many of you have seen this far more often than I have and understand good stockmanship practices. There are no magic words and it is certainly not a new concept. Rather, I believe the most important factor is realizing the patience it takes to accomplish this. All too often, and I’m guilty of it myself, we have so much going on in a day that we are trying to cram and get cattle out and move on to the next task. Taking the time to allow the cattle to move at their own will and for us to somewhat manipulate that movement will prove much more impactful in getting groups to graze those

tricky areas and allow us as producers to utilize all of our grass, an asset that is harder and harder to come by.

We are fortunate that Dr. Justin Waggoner, K-State Beef Systems Specialist, is highly knowledgeable when it comes to stockmanship and cattle handling. If you have been to any Post Rock Extension meetings, you may have heard from Dr. Waggoner or you may have seen some of his information that I've shared in this paper or via radio. With further questions, I would be glad to work alongside of you and Dr. Waggoner in improving techniques or approaching issues that you feel may be able to be solved by using a different approach to cattle handling.

### **Source**

Hibbard, Whit & Hnatow, Dawn "Placing Cattle", *Drovers*, March 2018

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