

Conservation Feature Article -

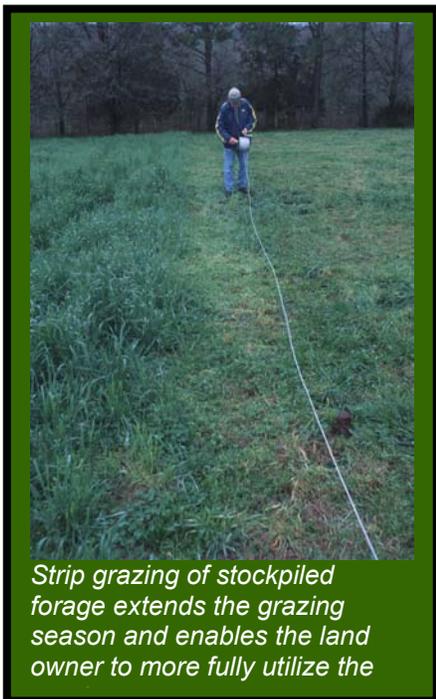


Stockpiling Forage

by Julie Best, Public Affairs Specialist, and Sid Brantly, Range Conservationist, USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, Auburn, AL

Billy Maples and his son Tommy are registered Angus cattle farmers in Limestone County, Alabama. When we caught up with Billy in late July, he was mowing hay, not an unusual sight for a cattle farmer at that time of year. What we really wanted to talk with Billy and Tommy about, however, was an alternative to feeding hay during the winter months.

In the cow-calf production, a large portion of the cost of producing the calves can be attributed to feed. The cost of the feed fluctuates depending upon if the feed is harvested and stored and then fed to the cattle or if the animals are allowed to harvest the feed for themselves. Billy Maples says, "If you are in the cattle business to make money, you've got to be cost effective." A cost effective measure that has been beneficial to Billy and Tommy has been stockpiling pasture for winter grazing.



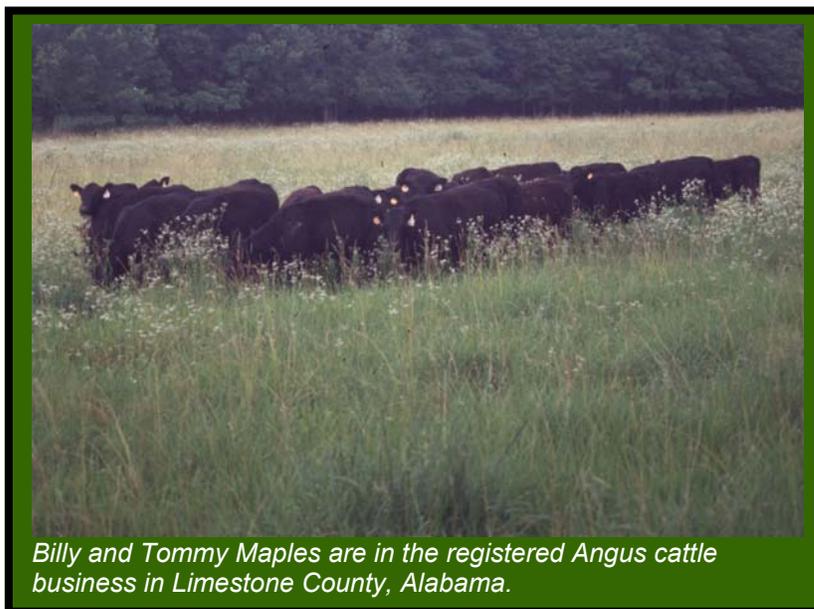
According to Billy, he had known about this practice for a number of years, but he didn't get serious about implementing the procedure until he went to a grazing school in Missouri several years ago. That fall, he decided to give it a try, and he was satisfied with the results. "That year, we got to the middle of February before we had to start feeding hay, and any day you cut down on feeding hay, you are making money," says Tommy.

Billy says stockpiling is a relatively easy procedure to implement. First of all, you need enough pasture so you can take the cows off the pasture and allow the pasture to grow starting in August or September. For the best results, you need to fertilize for maximum growth, and then you let nature take its course. Hopefully, there will be enough rain to promote growth. Then, in late fall or early winter, turn the cattle into the pasture and let them harvest the feed themselves.

According to Billy, "If there is an adequate water supply available, it's good if you can strip graze the stockpiled pasture." Strip grazing of stockpiled forage extends the grazing season and enables the land owner to more fully utilize the grazing area.

Tommy says, "We reversed the process last year. We fed the hay in the early fall, and then we turned the cattle into the pasture in late January or early February. I liked that. The cattle were grazing in the pasture during the cold winter, rainy months instead of me feeding hay in the mud!"

The Maples have been registered Angus cattlemen since 1937. Tommy's children are the fourth generation on the cattle farm. According to Tommy, "We're the second longest continuous registered herd in Alabama. The cattle business is in good shape. The demand for beef is up and we are optimistic about the future. There will always be issues, but as long as we can provide a good quality product, we'll be all right. As Dad said, we've got to be cost effective. Stockpiling has worked for us. If we can save 10 to 30 days of hay, that's a money-making proposition for us."



Successful stockpiling is a result of planning, timing, and weather. Now is the time to start setting aside pasture to graze in late fall and winter. To learn more about stockpiling for winter grazing, contact your local USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.

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