

# Raising Environmentally Adapted Cattle

*. . . . Pharo Ranch maximizes profit, not production*

Kit Pharo believes his ranch should earn a profit every year.

*“It’s a business, we must make a profit,”* says Pharo. And that’s what he and wife, Deanna, and family have achieved. Pharo Cattle Company is located eight miles north of Cheyenne Wells in the short-grass prairie of eastern Colorado. They own or lease some 6,000 acres and operate a commercial cowherd, as a registered cowherd.

*“Our seedstock program consists of Red Angus, Black Angus, Tarentaise, Hereford, and Composites,”* says Pharo. Their bull sales have grown from seven when they started in 1990 to over 350 in 2003.

*“We have repeat customers from 18 different states,”* he said. Over the years, Pharo has observed that every farm or ranch is either “production driven” or “profit driven.” He believes that too many are production driven.

*“We’ve been programmed to think in terms of bushels per acre or pounds per calf, instead of in terms of profit per acre or profit per cow,”* says Pharo.

He said profitable ranchers have one thing in common. Without exception, they strive to make the most efficient use of the forage resources on their ranch. This requires a three-legged approach:

- 1) Management-Intensive Grazing** - properly managed and controlled rotational grazing,
- 2) Matching the Production Cycle to Your Forage Resources** - calving and weaning in sync with Mother Nature, and
- 3) Matching Cow Size and Type to Forage Resources** - producing cows that can survive on what the ranch produces with little or no inputs.

The Pharos began implementing their management-intensive grazing system in 1994 with technical grazing assistance from the Soil Conservation Service, now the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and after piping some water and building crossfences. The Great



Ben Berlinger, Natural Resources Conservation Service Rangeland Management Specialist, left, and Kit Pharo discuss the benefits of Pharo’s management-intensive grazing system during severe drought in eastern Colorado.

Plains Conservation Program, through the NRCS, provided cost-share for the water delivery system. The crossfencing was done on their own.

*“We started with 12 paddocks and now have 24,” says Pharo. “This allows us to increase grass production by providing more time for rest and growth of the plants,” he said.*

The basic rule of thumb is to rotate cattle fast when the grass is growing fast and slow when the grass is growing slow. Pharo says cattle must be moved to new pasture before they have the opportunity to graze any plants for the second time. A typical year in his grazing system allows each paddock to be grazed twice during the growing season for a total of 8 to 10 days and once for 10 to 12 days during the winter months.

*“With our system,” says Pharo, “every acre of grass is grazed only 20 days each year and rested 345 days.” Ben Berlinger, NRCS Rangeland Management Specialist, La Junta, Colo., says. “Over the years the Pharo’s have adopted some excellent prescribed grazing management practices. Kit controls the frequency and intensity of each grazing event so that grazing periods are kept as short as possible.”*

*“The prescribed grazing that the Pharo’s have implemented has definitely helped to maintain their rangeland condition and plant vigor through our recent drought,” he said.*

During the drought, Kit was forced to sell some replacement heifers, divide paddocks into smaller pastures, graze the Conservation Reserve Program, and move his entire cow herd back east to greener pastures in the fall of 2002.

He brought some of the cows back in June 2003 when early spring moisture was good. Next in their management system, is matching the production cycle to the ranch’s available forage resources. Forage availability and nutritional value are extremely low until new growth begins in the spring.

*“When the cow’s needs are not being met by the forage resources on the ranch,” says Pharo, “it means a huge feed bill.”*

*“I’ve concluded that I cannot afford to feed a cow everything she needs to raise a calf and breed back before the grass starts to green up,” he said.*

In Pharo’s system, when he calves in late April and May, instead of in February, there is a big difference in the amount of supplemental feed required by cows. This can easily save up to \$100 per cow.

*“When the forage resources on my ranch can no longer meet the nutritional requirements of a lactating cow, it is time to wean calves,” Pharo continued.*

*“If I have to do some supplemental feeding, it’s much more cost effective to put my feed dollars directly into the calf, instead of trying to run them through the mother cow,” he said.*

Pharo believes much potential profit is lost because most producers are not calving and weaning in sync with nature.

*“I know of producers who are saving thousands of dollars after making this simple change,” he said. “One ranch in particular went from calving in March to calving in May. They start calving May 15. In the process they have reduced their feed expenses by 75 percent.”*

Finally, Pharo’s system strives to match cow size and type to forage resources. This means selecting and breeding cows that can survive strictly on what the ranch produces.

Pharo says, *“All cows are not created equal. Some cows are much more efficient and much more profitable than others are.”*

So, how do you identify the most efficient cows?

*“What we do is identify our least efficient cows and get rid of them,” says Pharo. “Over the years, we have made a conscious effort to gradually reduce our feed and feed expenses. This caused our hard-keeping, less-efficient cows to come up open or late-bred in the fall,” he said.*

*“These are the cows that do not fit my environment. They require more than my ranch produces and they must be culled and sold,” says Pharo.*

Pharo explains that unless you have an unlimited amount of extremely cheap feed, you cannot afford to feed and maintain cows that weigh over 1,200 pounds.

*“Even if feed is extremely cheap,” says Pharo, “I would rather run a higher number of smaller cows on the same forage resources.”*

*“If a ranch can support 100 cows that weigh 1,200 pounds, it should be able to support 120 cows that weigh 1,000 pounds. That’s 20 percent more cows producing 20 percent more calves. Those 120 smaller cows will always out produce the 100 larger cows,” he said.*

Berlinger explains that the Pharos use fecal sampling combined with the Nutrition Balance Analyzer (NUTBAL) program to monitor forage quality throughout the grazing season.

The Pharos also monitor their rangeland trend using photo points and the land EKG methodology developed by Charlie Orchard. The success of the Pharo’s operation was again evidenced at their Fall Bull Sale, November 1.

During a time when ranchers were still worried about drought and herd size, the Pharos conducted a record bull sale, selling 131 animals for an overall average price of \$3,353.

The highest priced bull (PCC ZBest), a son of PCC Colorado Hobo, sold for \$6,160.

Pharo says, *“To achieve optimum production, ranchers must produce cows that fit their environment, instead of artificially changing the environment to fit their cows.”*

*“Since many ranchers have cows that are too big and inefficient, they are forced to feed harvested and purchased feed to keep their cows in production. This quickly takes most of the profit out of ranching. The easiest way to make money is to save money,” he says.*

If you'd like to learn more about the Pharo's ranching history and philosophy, you may log onto their website at: [www.pharocattle.com](http://www.pharocattle.com).