

# Planning Ahead

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**P**lanning ahead is an important part of a successful cattle operation and forage program. With cattle prices down and predicted to remain so for several years, the need to lower inputs and maintain income makes good planning imperative. Failure to plan ahead often results in problems and inability to reach objectives. It is like the advertising statement popularized by International Business Machines a number of years ago, "Plan Ahead" had the letters getting smaller and smaller in the second word because the author was running out of space. Similarly, poor planning or lack of it can get a livestock producer in lots of trouble.

## Alternatives to think about in your planning

Now that the price situation is not very favorable, what can a cattle producer do to deal with it?

(1) With nitrogen fertilizer prices up, there will be a temptation to reduce or eliminate nitrogen inputs in pastures. This will reduce costs but will also reduce forage yields. Several other options are available:

(a) If broiler litter is available nearby at reasonable cost, this can be a cheap source of nutrients to maintain pasture productivity.

(b) Plant legumes in pastures. Annual clovers such as crimson, arrowleaf, or subterranean can be cheaply overseeded on bermudagrass and bahiagrass pastures to provide high-quality grazing in late winter and spring as well as providing nitrogen to the grass. Red clover overseeded in tall fescue will do a great job of growing from spring through much of the summer to improve grazing quality and provide nitrogen. Annual lespedeza seeded into bermudagrass or tall fescue pastures will add quality to late summer and early autumn grazing.

(2) Do a better job of making high-quality hay and storing it under cover. Good quality hay can greatly reduce the need to feed expensive protein and



energy supplements in winter. Storing hay under cover and feeding round bales in a bale rack will reduce hay waste.

(3) Put in a few cheap electric cross fences to concentrate animals and better utilize forage so there will be less waste in pastures.

(4) If you don't already have a controlled breeding season, consider this management as a way to match the seasonal pasture forage quality with the nutrient needs of your animals.

(5) If you need additional income, think about commercial hay production if you have the land and equipment. High-quality hybrid bermudagrass or endophyte-free tall fescue hay is in demand and brings a good price from dairy farmers and pleasure horse owners. The emphasis here must be on dependable supplies of young, leafy hay that has been tested for quality.

(6) When cattle prices are down, alternative animal opportunities may sound attractive but they should be considered with great caution.

(a) Meat goats offer some realistic opportunities with good prices as demand for meat is growing as our Hispanic population continues to expand. A number of Georgia cattle producers profitably produce meat goats for sale in Georgia and Florida. Goats graze well together with cattle. They are also useful

for weed control as they eat many weeds such as curly dock, briars, and persimmon that cattle will not consume. One hazard with goats can be feral dogs and coyotes that can kill small kids. Goats are often thought to eat anything and can survive on poor forages but if decent gains are expected, then good pastures are necessary.

(b) Llama production was promoted actively for a number of years, with high prices for breeding stock. Today, with no real market for a growing number of animals, prices plunged. No opportunity here.

(c) Ostrich and emu breeding stock are selling at very high prices. Unless a real market develops for ostrich meat, these high prices cannot be sustained and buyers will be stuck with some high-priced birds. Looking at South African ostrich production, it has been a boom and bust industry based largely on demand for feathers used in ladies apparel. At the present time, this looks like a very risky venture dependent on new buyers of overpriced breeding stock.

(d) Deer farming for venison production is a growing industry in the USA with a profitable future. It has been a major industry in New Zealand for over 20 years where there are now over one million deer pastured on farms and venison exports of over \$30 million annually, most of this going to western Europe. In contrast, there only about 35,000 farmed deer in the USA at present but numbers are growing. In contrast to many other exotic animal promotions, deer farming is a market-driven industry. Currently, over 75% of the venison consumed in the USA is imported from New Zealand. Thus, in our country the demand far exceeds supply and the price per pound is two to three times that of beef. What accounts for this venison demand? Farm-raised venison is a higher quality meat than wild meat because of better nutrition, health care, and marketing at a young age. Low fat and cholesterol make it attractive to many

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consumers for health reasons. Properly prepared venison is featured on menus of upscale restaurants in most large cities.

Deer farming can be a profitable enterprise but requires a high level of management. Fallow or red deer require special handling facilities, high electric fences around pastures, and vaccinations. Fallow deer breeding stock sell for about that of meat price while red deer are higher. Since deer have a fixed early June fawning season, nutrient needs are highest during summer when perennial grasses often decline in quality. Thus, to avoid expensive feed supplements, high-quality alfalfa, red clover, or perennial peanut pasture should be provided during summer for the females and their fawns. Anyone contemplating deer farming should arrange for slaughter facilities and marketing before they start such an enterprise.

More information can be obtained by contacting me by mail at: Crop & Soil Sciences Dept., University of Georgia, Athens, GA 30602 or by phone at: 706-542-0929, or by E-mail at: Hovelanduga.cc.uga.edu

### Conclusion

During this time of lower cattle prices, it is important to carefully plan ahead. It is cheaper to make mistakes scribbling ideas on paper and discarding them than to lose money on ill-planned ventures. Reducing costs and improving efficiency are the keys to weathering the present difficulties. Beef is a strong commodity and demand can be expected to increase. Good planning with an efficient forage program can improve your profits in the future.

## SCRIPTURE OF THE MONTH

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

**MATTHEW 11:28**

**RICK TORRANCE  
LAGRANGE, GEORGIA**