



Virginia Forage and Grassland Council, Inc. Farm Demonstration Background Sheet

Using Conservation Practices to Implement Improved Grazing Management While Conserving Soil and Water Resources

Farm Demonstration Cooperator

Mr. Ronnie Nuckols
Owner-operator

Farm Facts:

30 miles west of Richmond, VA north of Route 6 in Goochland County

Typical rolling piedmont landscape consisting mostly of highly weathered, well-drained, upland soils with good forage production potential

Fenced, non-forested pastureland totals approximately 115 acres

Enterprise:

Commercial cow/calf production system, primarily Angus cross cattle

Stocked with 70 cow-calf pairs, 3 bulls and 20 yearling replacement heifers

Managed with both fall and spring calving herds

Grant Recipient:

This farm demonstration was partially funded through a USDA-NRCS Conservation Innovation Grant

Key Project Partners:

USDA-NRCS
Monacan Soil and Water Conservation District
Virginia Cooperative Extension
Virginia Tech

Ronnie Nuckols

- Mr. Nuckols owns and operates a beef cattle farm in Crozier, VA.
- He took over full management of this farm in 2009 after retiring from his construction business.
- Until this time, the farm had been continuously grazed resulting in thin, low-productivity pastures and heavy weed pressure.
- This common scenario relied heavily on excessive hay feeding during the winter and relatively low weaning weights.

Motivating Factors

- Ronnie began to attend local educational programs conducted by Extension and the Soil and Water Conservation District.
- He networked with a small group of experienced graziers and cattlemen then began to consider how he could improve his forage base and herd genetics.
- He attended regional pasture walks, forage conferences and the VFGC Beginning Graziers School.

Implementing Conservation to Achieve Farm Production Goals

- After developing basic goals for improvement with his peers, Ronnie sought after technical and financial assistance for accomplishing his goals.
- He partnered with his local Soil and Water Conservation District to exclude livestock from farm surface waters and developed a livestock water system and the cross fencing to begin basic rotational grazing.



Benefits

- Installed approximately 15,000 linear feet of stream exclusion fencing
- Creating a vegetated buffer protecting streams and ponds while providing an access lane around the perimeter of his pasture system.
- The water system and cross fencing allow for improved forage utilization by the grazing livestock, making up for the excluded pasture acreage.
- The managed grazing system allows for good forage recovery after grazing and makes it easy to control and move the livestock.
- The ability to stockpile fescue in the fall and strip-graze this forage into the winter extended the grazing season.

Plans for the Future

- The next major priority is to increase grazing management and begin using annual forages to provide fresh forage for grazing during late fall and early spring to build soil health and improve overall system productivity.