

Cattle Grazing and the Land

Cattle farmers and ranchers are committed to leaving the environment in better shape for the next generation. Preserving, conserving and restoring this country's natural resources like open space, grasslands, wetlands, clean air and wildlife habitat are as important to cattlemen as they are to you.

Approximately 85 percent of U.S. grazing lands are unsuitable for producing crops. Grazing animals on this land more than doubles the area that can be used to produce food. Cattle play a valuable role in the ecosystem by converting the forages humans cannot consume into a nutrient-dense food.

The cattle industry provides support for effective grazing management. The "Grazing Lands Management Plan," for example, helps beef producers consider the rate of growth and consumption of plants in a given area when deciding how to rotate cattle to new pastures.

Positive Effect on Wildlife

A combination of livestock and wildlife management on grazing lands has resulted in better species survival than when these activities are practiced separately.

- In the Eastern and Central United States, wildlife is almost entirely dependent on ranch, farm and other private lands; so, ranchers play an important role in the survival of native species.
- A California-based study (*Conservation Biology*, Summer 2005) shows cattle grazing plays an important role in maintaining the wetland habitat necessary for some endangered species.

Environmental Stewardship

Good environmental practices not only conserve and improve natural resources, they also enhance land productivity. Many beef cattle producers practice natural resource management activities including soil tests, brush and weed control programs, grazing management plans, minimum or no-till systems and range quality and grass utilization monitoring.

- Established in 1991, the Environmental Stewardship Award has recognized 194 beef cattle farmers and ranchers who effectively combine stewardship and business practices. The award not only highlights industry stewardship, but also provides examples and ideas that may be applied by other livestock farmers and ranchers (<http://www.environmentalstewardship.org>). The Environmental Stewardship Award is administered by the National Cattlemen's Foundation.
- The beef industry encourages all cattle farmers and ranchers to practice responsible resource stewardship by:
 - Managing for the environment as a whole, including climate, soil, topography, plant and animal communities;
 - Monitoring and documenting effective practices and regularly soliciting input from expert sources to improve resource management;
 - Helping develop public and private research projects; and
 - Never knowingly causing or permitting public or private land abuses.

Water Quality

Beef farmers and ranchers ensure proper practices are used to comply with the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Clean Water Act, established in 1972. The National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System program regulates the discharge of pollutants from Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFO) (http://cfpub1.epa.gov/npdes/home.cfm?program_id=7). A final rule enacted in 2003 ensures that CAFOs take appropriate actions to manage manure in order to protect the nation's water quality. All large CAFOs (more than 1,000 animals) are required to apply for a permit, submit an annual report and develop and follow a plan for handling manure and wastewater.

Air Quality

U.S. beef farmers and ranchers are responsible stewards of the air and atmosphere. Their livelihood is closely connected to preserving a healthy, safe and clean environment for food production. Therefore, controlling dust has been a priority land-management practice in America for generations. Beef farmers and ranchers are experienced in using Best Management Practices (BMP) to maintain air quality surrounding their operations.

In addition, animal agriculture contributes minimally to the production of total greenhouse gasses.

- According to the EPA (2010), the *entire* U.S. agricultural sector accounts for only 6 percent of total U.S. greenhouse gas emissions and livestock production is only a small portion (2.9%) of that total.
http://www.epa.gov/climatechange/emissions/downloads10/US-GHG-Inventory-2010_Chapter6-Agriculture.pdf
- Methane emissions in the United States are on the decline. According to the EPA, overall U.S. Methane levels declined 7.4 percent from 1990 to 2008. Methane from livestock accounts for only 2.6 percent of total U.S. GHG emissions (EPA 2010).