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THE GRAZIER'S EDGE



These Canadian cattle are not eating snow they are grazing stockpiled pasture beneath the snow. Steve Kenyon has found that cattle can graze through snow two to three feet deep. For details see Kenyon's article on page five.

Ayrshire Farms Uses Heritage Breeds Of Cattle And Pigs

By Becky Gillette

UPPERVILLE, Virginia: Ayrshire Farm has roots that go deep into history with the farm established nearly 200 years ago in 1821.

In 1996, Ayrshire Farm began its journey to what it is today when it was purchased by Sandy Lerner, who had a dream to raise humane and organic meat on a sustainable farm.

Ayrshire averages about 900 head of beef cattle and 300 pigs on-site, plus works with other farms to raise their free-range chickens and turkeys. Shire horses are used to chain harrow fields.

"Our pigs are all pasture based. They farrow outdoors on pasture and are raised to finish on pasture. They are also given an organic pig feed," said Crystal Ritenour, Licensed Veterinary Technician (LVT), who is the large livestock manager for the farm. They raise Gloucestershire Old Spot pigs primarily, but also do an Old Spot cross with Tamworth pigs.

Ritenour said one of the challenges of raising pigs is understanding the importance of letting the animals on fresh ground regularly. It takes time to learn how to look at the fields and know when it has been grazed enough, but not too much that the ground becomes compacted.

"Ground compaction will bring more weeds," she said.

"If the grazing is done properly, the fields will improve over time and the animals will benefit. I

What Is Your Livestock Business' Breeding Objective?

By Steven D. Lukefahr

KINGSVILLE, Texas: Perhaps more so in the USA cattle industry than in any other livestock industry is there such a multitude of breeding objectives among its producers.

One reason for this dilemma is the vast number of breeds (80 or more) that are in the USA. Second, there are many traits of interest with minor to major economic importance. And third, there are many different environments to consider.

The same can all be said of USA goat and sheep producers who also raise many breed-types on open range across diverse environments. Because there are so many breeds, enterprise types, and unique environments, this explains why indeed there are as many different breeding objectives among ranchers as breeders.

In contrast, commercial broiler

chickens are remarkably uniform due largely to a narrow genetic base, a standardized environment, and a focused breeding objective for the industry as a whole. For example: to select for a fast-gaining bird that yields a meaty carcass by market age. In a horse example, the Thoroughbred breed, the breeding objective has largely focused simply on selection for speed performance.

But what really is a breeding objective? Basically, it is a statement about how the business plans to make genetic progress to enhance profits. Traditionally in the cow-calf enterprise the breeding objective for many ranchers has been to increase weaning weights through selection. Of course this focus has been proved to have counterproductive consequences; nonetheless it is still a clear example of a breeding objective.

I will provide better examples

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Breeding Objective

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later but at least you now have a clearer idea of what a breeding objective is.

SEEDSTOCK AND COMMERCIAL BREEDERS

Obviously, a breeding objective

implies one operates a breeding herd. This is regardless of whether natural matings or artificial inseminations occur.

Next it is appropriate to distinguish between a seedstock versus a commercial business. The latter is more simplified when it comes to the breeding objective because the focus is on producing meat

animals. The breeding objective relates to the selection of animals that produce a saleable market product of value.

On the other hand, seedstock breeders usually maintain purebred herds where there are not only many traits but new tools to consider that are of potential economic importance or value.

