

Creep Pastures for Calves on Forest Range

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Cattle grazing is still an important resource on millions of acres of forest range in southwest Louisiana and throughout the southern Coastal Plain. However, the nutritional value of forage on much of this forest range is too low to carry a cattle herd yearlong. So the cattle owner must supplement the forage resource for at least part of the year in order to receive a reasonable return from the calf crop.

The two most common forage supplements are a dry or liquid protein source, fed especially during the fall and winter months, or improved pasture. Both items are expensive if provided in adequate amount. On a continuing schedule, however, improved pastures seem to be the more economical means of providing supplemental feed for a range herd.

On the West Louisiana Experiment Station in southwestern Louisiana, we are providing improved pasture grazing for calves in a herd of 29 cows grazing approximately 225 acres of forest range. Two 5-acre creep pastures of common Bermudagrass overseeded each fall with ryegrass and clover are located adjacent to the range units. Calves are free to graze in the creep pasture when the cow herd is in the adjacent range unit.

We have also established 30-foot-wide grassed firebreaks around the boundary of the range units to provide supplemental grazing for the cows. These firebreaks, which cover about 7 acres, were also seeded to common Bermudagrass and are overseeded annually to ryegrass and clover for winter grazing. The cow herd receives salt with phosphorus and calcium year-long and hay and cottonseed meal as needed during mid-winter.

We think this management scheme can be quite economical and profitable. In 1978, the 29 cows dropped 28 calves in January, February, and March, and the calves averaged 468 lb at 205 days of age—almost 2.3 lb of gain per day. The calves weaned in mid-October at an average weight of 518 lb and sold for \$49.28 per net cwt. This amounts to gross return of \$246.49 per cow or \$420.48 per acre of improved pasture (creep pastures plus firebreaks).



Range calves move freely between the creep pasture and the cow herd on forest range.

What did it cost to establish the creep pastures? Costs naturally fluctuate from year to year and may vary widely from region to region. Our total costs—for establishment, seed, fertilizer, and annual maintenance—have amounted to about \$85 per acre per year. Included in these per-acre costs are seedbed preparation, initial seeding with 5 lb of Bermudagrass, overseeding with 20 lb of ryegrass plus 3 lb of clover each fall, twice a year applications of 200 lb of 9-23-30 fertilizer and 300 lb of ammonium nitrate, plus 1–2 T of lime every 2 or 3 years.

Creep pastures for calves and grass firebreaks for cows, combined with rotational grazing and burning of the forest range, seem to be working for us. And we believe this management system is a viable alternative to protein supplements or cows themselves grazing on improved pasture to supplement native forest range.

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