

No Better Time

With land values high and record profitability in the cow-calf sector, consider investing in weed control.

by Kindra Gordon, field editor



PHOTO BY SHAUNA ROSE HERMEL

With cow-calf producers experiencing record-high profitability over the last couple years, Charles Hart has a recommendation for producers as they consider where to invest their profits. Hart, who is a range and pasture market development specialist for Dow AgroSciences, suggests landowners evaluate putting money into getting their pastures in shape.

He explains, “Demand for beef is high and there continues to be a limited supply, which has resulted in record profitability for beef producers.” As the beef industry looks to expand cattle production, Hart says that makes forages extremely valuable.

Thus, he says, “From an economic standpoint, there’s no better time to invest in improving pastures by focusing on weed control and brush control and putting some of that record profitability into the land.”

With record-high land prices, Hart makes the point, “If you are looking to increase carrying capacity, it’s cheaper to open up new land [via weed or brush control] than buy new land.”

Have a plan

Hart says the first step in implementing a weed- or brush-control plan is to inventory your land and identify the invasive species that are present.

Second, he says consideration will need

to be given to the timing of the herbicide application, the type of product and the rate applied. Those factors will vary with the weed species you are trying to control.

The application timing is very different for treating annual vs. perennial invasive species, and even biennials and thistles, notes Hart. “Timing is critical.”

“The earlier you can treat annual species the better,” says Hart, who offers 4 to 6 inches (in.) of plant height as a rule of thumb for the proper time to treat annuals.

With perennials it is often best to let the plant get to maturity before treatment, Hart says. “This helps ensure when the herbicide is applied, it will go into the root system rather than just kill the top of the plant.”

Determining whether to use spot, broadcast or aerial applications should also be evaluated based on the invasive species being addressed.

After herbicide application occurs, grazing does not have to be deferred, but grazing management should be considered, says Hart. “Good grazing management is important. You don’t want to overgraze the pasture or your weed-control efforts won’t be effective for the long term.”

Whenever open ground occurs —

whether from drought, fire or overgrazing — Mother Nature tries to fill that void, he explains. “Ninety-nine percent of the time it’s with a weedy plant.”

Brush battles

Regarding brush management, Hart notes that it’s an investment that can really increase the amount of grazeable acres.

When should brush management be considered? Hart says when woody species or plants like prickly pear dominate greater than 25% of the cover on the land, they are having a negative impact on available forage and accessibility to existing forage.

With brush, Hart says timing is even more species-specific than weeds. Thus he advises it is important to work with trained specialists who can develop the right application recipe for the situation being addressed.

Hart also notes that often a combination of strategies, including chemical, mechanical and management, are necessary to get brush under control.

“There’s no one silver bullet,” he says.

Hart recommends for both weed- and brush-control planning that landowners work with Extension, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) or a Dow representative.



Editor’s Note: Kindra Gordon is a freelancer and cattlewoman from Whitewood, S.D.