View Point

Short-Duration Grazing in Retrospect—A Practitioner’s Experience

By Sid Goodloe

“Short-duration grazing” (SDG) is a commonsense approach to rangeland management that has been implemented, criticized, lauded, altered, and renamed since it was exposed to world scrutiny over 40 years ago. We now call this South African/Rhodesian–originated method of matching herbivores to plants “holistic planned grazing” (HPG). It has become an economic, environmental, and social improvement to the way land owners and managers approach animal use of grazing lands. Here I offer my own account of its history and my personal viewpoint as to its current and future utility for range managers faced with the task of contributing to world food production in the face of climate uncertainties.

In 1963 I was announcing the Smokey Bear Stampede rodeo in Capitan, New Mexico, when a neighbor approached the announcer's stand and told me that there was a man in the audience I should meet. Agreeing, I asked where this person was from. "I'm not sure, but I think he's from somewhere south of Artesia," was the reply.

Aubrey Mountain, a rancher from Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), who had been selected as the top agriculturalist in his country that year and had received a Nuffield Scholarship to come to the United States to study our livestock industry, was the man, though not from Artesia, New Mexico, but from then-named Rhodesia in southern Africa (Artesia and Rhodesia do sound similar). I had suppressed an interest in going to Kenya several years before because of the Mau Mau Rebellion, so I had an interest in Africa and invited Aubrey to our ranch. He had other appointments at much larger operations in the Southwest but decided to cancel and stay with us because we were operating on a very stingy budget much the same as he did from me.

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We kept in touch for a couple of years, then with the extra income from cutting firewood and fenceposts and from fee hunting on our ranch, my wife Shirley and I were able to purchase tickets to Rhodesia. We spent several weeks with Aubrey and Rose on their ranch near Que Que, then toured other ranches and game parks. The self reliance, innovative ability and hardiness of the ranchers we met left a lasting impression.

In 1966, while managing the Fort Stanton Range Research Station for New Mexico State University, I was offered the opportunity to work in Kenya as an adviser to their Range Management Division within the Ministry of Agriculture. During my 2 1/2-year stay in Kenya I flew to Rhodesia in 1967 to spend more time on Aubrey’s ranch. We went to a “field day” on a neighboring ranch that had invited Allan Savory to be their key speaker. He introduced a grazing method developed by Andre Voisin, a French dairy farmer who had expanded on the benefits of “strip grazing.”

A South African botanist named John Phillip H. Acocks had studied Voisin’s grazing protocol and stated that “South Africa is overgrazed and understocked” and needed a new approach to grazing. He teamed up with Mr. and Mrs. L. N. Howell, ranchers from Springfontein, South Africa, to reduce selective grazing by installing the early forms of what was then called the “Acocks–Howell grazing system.”

In discussions with Evlyn and Edward Rushmore, who ranched north of Bulawayo, Rhodesia, Allan had agreed with them that domestic livestock were degrading rangelands in South Africa. The breakthrough came later when the Rushmores and Savory realized that the method of grazing, not the number of cattle, sheep, and goats, was the problem. The Kroon family, clients of Savory’s who had properties in Namibia and South Africa, became interested and successfully implemented what was then labeled SDG.

Savory had also witnessed land abuse caused by year-long grazing by livestock while serving as Provincial Game Officer in Northern Rhodesia (Zambia). He decided to investigate an approach to grazing management by rotating livestock through different smaller paddocks rather than leaving them in one large paddock throughout the year. Allan found that this concept, instigated by Acocks and the Howells and put into practice by the Kroon family as SDG, had some ecologically sound ideas involved. He then decided to work with ranchers who might wish to experiment with this alternative to the traditional year-round grazing practiced at that time.

After hearing Allan’s description at the field day of how SDG was being used in Rhodesia, I went to visit several of