

CONSERVATION PROFILES

*“Cattle come and go
but the grass is our
base resource, that’s
what takes care of the
livestock, that’s what
takes care of us.”*

Mark Frasier



Colorado

Chris, Mark, Joe and Marshall Frasier

Ecological Excellence Trumps Drought

Read what Mark Frasier has to say about Frasier Ranch and it’s easy to get the impression you’re being taught by an ecology professor. In a way you would be right. But Dad Marshall and brothers Joe, Mark and Chris Frasier—do their observing and experimenting not in a classroom, but on their 44,000 acre cattle ranch on the rolling high plains in eastern Colorado.

Mark writes: “The cornerstone of our ranch is carefully planned grazing. We carefully plan the annual use of over 190 grazing paddocks to harvest forage for its optimum nutrition and economic value, while respecting the health of the range plants and condition of the soil surface. We employ livestock as a tool to recycle nutrients and organic matter into the soil, and to break any exposed soil crust; increasing the permeability and fertility (and moisture) of the soil...(The) health of a riparian zone is largely dependent upon the condition of the surrounding watershed, and the key to a healthy watershed is soil surface management.”

The Frasier’s have 18 years of holistic resource management experience under their belts to draw from as they relate this intricate understanding of conditions on their ranch. Both the Frasier’s and the Colorado Livestock Association believe their environmental work like their rotational grazing system deserves the credit for keeping them in business during the recent drought. Frasier’s also credit this system with the significant biodiversity on the ranch.

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When the Frasier's rattle off the list of wildlife species on their ranch they start with dung beetles and caterpillars—acknowledging the ecological role of such humble beings—before proceeding to songbirds, turkeys, jackrabbits, fox, mule deer and pronghorn antelope. There are also threatened bird species such as burrowing owls, ferruginous hawks, golden eagles and mountain plovers. The ranch works with the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory to successfully protect the vulnerable species. The Frasier's also have monitoring data reflecting an 85% increase in plant biodiversity including grasses, legumes, forbs and brush—all affording a diverse nutritional diet for livestock.

Interestingly, the Frasier's credit Nature with teaching them observational skills that have translated into valuable business lessons. “Just as it is imperative to remain observant and flexible when managing within the constantly shifting parameters of nature,” they say, “we have learned to be responsive to market and business opportunities.”

The Frasier's' stewardship reflects their intent to extend to future generations the resource opportunities they have inherited from the work of forebearers. “Yet in the interest of balance,” they add, “core elements of the business must not be neglected, since continued success requires both ecological and economic sustainability.”



Miles of fencing and water lines allow the Frasier's to move cattle to best take advantage of the grass available while observing and managing natural resources for optimum ecological functioning.

This ranch and wildlife have a very long history: Here you will find not only a diverse set of plants and animals—including threatened and endangered bird species—but the only complete fossilized sea turtle in North America.

CONSERVATION AT A GLANCE

Programs Used:

Great Plains Conservation Program
Agriculture and Soil Conservation Program

Key Practices:

Rotational grazing

50 dams

3 wells

4,000 trees planted for wildlife and shelterbelts

Water diversions for 300 acres of meadows

Pipedrops for erosion control

130 miles+ of fencing

55 miles of water pipeline

60 watering troughs

