



CONSERVATION Showcase

Thyen Family Honored with Range Management Award

As winners of the 2009 South Dakota Society for Range Management Area Excellence, Ron and Dianne Thyen were recognized for their stewardship ethic on their over 900 acre ranch near Hayti, SD.

The Thyens are progressive by using conservation technology to enhance their operation. Ron was the first producer to bring flea beetles into Hamlin County for the control of leafy spurge. He has since hosted many collection days for release in other parts of the state. Ron and Dianne have



organized numerous ranch tours, both large and small. In 2004, The Lake Poinsett Watershed Project, Hamlin Co. Conservation District, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) held a bus tour that included the Thyen Ranch. Many groups of students from South Dakota State University have visited various sites to identify grasses and forbs and to witness the benefits of rotational grazing. Ron recently participated in a forum on prescribed burning options and offered his observations from a producer's standpoint.

Ron and Dianne Thyen started a cow calf operation in 1975 doing artificial insemination with purebred Simmentals, which their children showed in 4-H.

Since the substantial growth of the herd in the last couple of years, they decided to choose good pedigree bulls, making sure the bull chosen for the heifers have an easy calving pedigree. The heifers are chosen by disposition, body frame, and structure and are bred to calve in March and the cows beginning in April.

Ron and his family work



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to keep their calving percentage as high as possible; when getting the cattle ready for pasture the cows are treated for lice and receive Preguard and the calves are de-liced and receive five to seven way treatments.

Each pasture is stocked with salt and mineral, and Ron and Dianne ensure enough oil treatments are on the oilers.

In mid September the bulls are pulled and the calves are worked and then put back in the pasture for the month.

By October, they are put in lots for “face-to-face bellowing” for a week and then the cows are back on stubble or stalks and the calves are sorted and started on feed rations. The Thyens buy extra feeder calves to fill the lots, and their goal is to have cattle finished and to market prior to the 4th of July each year.

To keep up with their growing cattle herd, Ron and Dianne began with the common practice of continuous season long grazing of large pastures. With the purchase of an adjoining farm, they were able to have pastures close enough together to begin a rotation from pasture to pasture. Seeing the success of the rest period for a rotation and the positive response from cattle to new grass, Ron began to subdivide even his existing pastures. Ron has utilized

funding from various partners including NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) funds and the Lake Poinsett Watershed Project to install pipeline, watering facilities, and cross-fences to better utilize his native range.

Rather than using aerial spraying for control of weeds on his pasture and rangeland, Ron and his family spend many hours spot spraying to control weeds and limit the destruction of desirable forage.

Ron and his family have witnessed the dramatic shift from a Brome grass/Kentucky bluegrass base back to a native plant community since Ron started patch burning in the spring of 1999. Ron credits the use of rotational grazing and patch burning along with placements of watering facilities for enhancing

the diversity of the forages that are available for the taste buds of their cattle and wildlife.

The Thyens have done a number of burns to help limit cool season invaders and rejuvenate warm season native grasses and forms. Sandy Smart, Assistant professor of Range Science at SDSU, and a number of his students are performing patch-burning studies to observe the shift in species as well as the utilization by the herd. Another graduate student from SDSU is using Thyens ranch for a study of the difference in species between rotational grazed, continuous grazed, and patch burned pastures. Ron and Dianne are willing to try any number of new ideas to produce the desired species for their cattle herds and improve the health and longevity of their rangeland.

