

FACT SHEET: The Environment and Cattle Production

<p>Cattle Grazing and the Land</p>	<p>America's farmers and ranchers are committed to caring for the nation's environmental resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cattle producers maintain grazing land which can include open space, woodlands, grass, trees, forests, plains, mountains, valleys and lowlands. • Approximately 85 percent of the nation's grazing lands are unsuitable for producing crops. • Cattle serve a valuable role in the ecosystem with their ability to convert forages that humans cannot consume into nutrient-dense food such as meat and milk. • Grazing animals on land unsuitable for crop production more than doubles the land area that can be used to produce food in this country. • Cattle grazing can be used to minimize the invasion of non-native plant species and to minimize the risk of wildfires by decreasing the amount of flammable material on the land. • The National Cattleman's Beef Association (NCBA) provides materials and other support for effective grazing management. By creating a "Grazing Lands Management Plan," for example, beef producers take into account the growth of plants in a given area and the rate at which forage plants are consumed when deciding how to rotate cattle to new pastures.
<p>Positive Effect on Wildlife</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A combination of livestock and wildlife management on grazing lands has resulted in better species survival than when these two activities are practiced separately. • In the eastern and central United States, wildlife is almost entirely dependent on ranch, farm and other private lands. Since these lands are the responsibility of individual land owners, ranchers play an important role in the survival of native species. • A California-based study (<i>Conservation Biology</i> journal, summer 2005) shows cattle grazing plays an important role in maintaining the wetland habitat necessary for some endangered species.
<p>Environmental Stewardship</p>	<p>Ranchers depend on healthy, natural resources for their livelihood and therefore, place high value on stewardship of the land.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good environmental practices not only conserve and improve natural resources, but also enhance the productivity of the land. • Many beef cattle producers practice natural resource management activities including soil tests, brush and weed control programs, grazing management plans, minimum or conservation tillage systems and range quality and grass utilization monitoring. • NCBA's Environmental Stewardship Award Program was established in 1991 in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Resources Conservation Services and recognizes beef cattle operations that effectively combine stewardship and business practices http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/farmland/2002/anniversary/beef.html. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The program provides an opportunity for the beef industry to showcase the stewardship and business practices that exist together on progressive farms and ranches. • Members of NCBA adopted a resolution of stewardship beliefs including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage for the environment as a whole, including climate, soil, topography, plant and animal communities. • Monitor and document effective practices. • Solicit input from a variety of sources on a regular basis to improve the art and science of resource management. • Help develop public and private research projects to enhance the current body of knowledge. • Never knowingly cause or permit abuses that result in permanent damage on public or private land.
<p>Water Quality</p>	<p>Beef producers ensure proper practices are used in every step of the beef production process to comply with the Environmental Protection Agency's Clean Water Act, established in 1972.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System program regulates the discharge of pollutants from Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) http://cfpub1.epa.gov/npdes/home.cfm?program_id=7. • A final rule enacted in 2003 ensures that CAFOs take appropriate actions to manage manure effectively in order to protect the nation's water quality and outlines expectations for proper land application. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Under the rule, all large CAFOs (more than 1,000 animals) are required to apply for a permit, submit an annual report and develop and follow a plan for handling manure and wastewater.

May 2006



Brought to you by the National Cattlemen's Beef Association on behalf of The Beef Checkoff.