

Mastering mullein improved grazing.



Ron Eilert

Wheat, milo and soybean fields aren't the only acres that get careful attention on Ron Eilert's Beloit, Kansas, farm. He considers his pasture grasses a high-value crop, too.

"My dad always took good care of our pastures," Eilert says. "He taught me that overuse just sets you up for trouble." It's one of those father-knows-best lessons that happened to stick, as evidenced by the continuing improvements taking shape on the ranch.

Tapping into the EQUIP program, Eilert crossfenced 4,000 pasture acres and developed a water system. Now he rotationally grazes 550 Charolais/Angus-cross pairs through 200- to 350-acre parcels, usually in groups of 75 to 100 pairs.

The grazing system gives Eilert the flexibility to graze more efficiently, taking into consideration forage response, season, weather conditions and plant species present.

"We usually operate at about 6.5 acres per cow, and go by the take-half/leave-half rule," Eilert says. Rainfall sets the stage. "We've had to cut back on our herd in recent years because of drought. You have to leave some grass or it will mean long-term problems."

The same efficiency crosses over to Eilert's breeding program. He breeds Angus cows to Charolais bulls with the goal to produce high-growth calves that yield top weights on sale day. While the bulk of his herd calves in the spring, Eilert breeds 170 head to fall calves.

"It's a great way to better utilize your bulls," Eilert says. "You can get a lot more

mileage out of your bull investment by splitting your herd and putting them to work twice per year."

Eilert also has done the math when it comes to replacement heifers. He doesn't keep any of his own heifers, opting instead to purchase replacements as bred heifers or heifers with calves by their side. Not only does this practice keep his cross true, but it takes out some of the variability.

"Heifers aren't cheap to keep back," Eilert says. "If you can buy 20 good heifers with calves already on the ground, you'll greatly reduce your risk of death loss. And you don't have to deal with calving out first-calf heifers."

Pasture patrol

With grass as his only feed source for more than half of most years, Eilert doesn't take kindly to dealing with production threats. So when he purchased 320 acres heavily infested with common mullein in spring 2006, Eilert didn't waste any time.

"Mullein competes with grass just like thistles," Eilert explains. "It will grow in large, dense patches that can really take a toll on grass production."

Common mullein is a biennial, producing a large rosette of thick, fuzzy leaves during the first year of growth. In the second season, it produces a single, stout, upright stem that can reach 2 to 6 feet tall. Eilert had battled mullein before with mixed results, but decided

to try new Milestone™ herbicide for this job.

"We treated the entire 320 acres on May 15," Eilert recalls. "We got a good 90 percent control on mullein. That's a better result than we've gotten from anything we've used before."

And while musk thistle wasn't the main focus, he says, Milestone killed the thistles in the treatment area, too, which was a nice bonus.


The 320-acre application went on by air. Then Eilert worked with a pickup and ATV rig to chase down escapes and other patches of thistles and mullein across the rest of his pastures.

"I don't ever want to see a stray," Eilert says. "Missed plants go to seed and undo all the work you did the year before." He plans to use Milestone in 2007 to prevent that.

"Milestone is just a more economical option because it's effective later in the season when mullein and thistle have started to bolt," Eilert explains. "Before, we worried about spraying too early because frost might stop the growth and we'd lose control, or that we would hit it too late in the growing season and the weeds would pull through. But Milestone did a great job, so I'm satisfied with that."

To help avoid some of those treatment-window issues, Eilert used to do most of his thistle and mullein spraying in the fall, but drought sometimes hindered fall applications, too.

"When we were treating in the fall, we really kept an eye on moisture. If you spray certain herbicides when it's dry, you won't get a good kill because the plants aren't growing," Eilert says.



RANCH PROFILE

Ron Eilert
Beloit, Kansas
Commercial Angus/
Charolais-cross herd

Pasture Pests:
Common mullein
and thistles

TRY THESE NEW OPTIONS THIS SPRING

Last year's introduction of aminopyralid brought revolutionary advances to Range & Pasture weed control. We continue hearing great things from the field as cattlemen, researchers, county weed specialists and land managers evaluate their initial season with Milestone™ herbicide and ForeFront™ R&P herbicide.

Created specifically for use on grasslands, Milestone and ForeFront R&P provide application flexibility, ease of use and improved activity on some of the toughest broadleaf weeds. And, they do so with a very favorable environmental profile. This will be the first full season of availability for Milestone and ForeFront R&P. Both give you great new options for early season applications. Here's more information to help determine which product fits your situation:

Milestone herbicide (aminopyralid) is ideal for targeted control of tough noxious and invasive weeds. It offers excellent activity on knapweeds, thistles, hawkweeds and other aggressive species known for their ability to take over and crowd out desirable range plants. At labeled rates of just 3 to 7 fluid ounces per acre, depending on the target species, Milestone controls emerged plants. Then its residual activity keeps working to form a barrier against susceptible new plants. Milestone™ herbicide translocates quickly throughout the entire plant, traveling deep into the root system for a more complete kill on stubborn perennials. Take Canada thistle, for example. Research has shown that Milestone, at the labeled rate of 7 fluid ounces per acre, provides unparalleled activity, with spring and fall applications providing up to 90 percent control one year



after treatment. Milestone carries no haying or grazing restrictions for any type of livestock, including horses, goats, sheep, beef cattle or lactating dairy animals;¹ it's an essentially nonvolatile, nonrestricted use pesticide;² and it can be applied up to the water's edge, so you can target the toughest invaders wherever they are growing.

ForeFront R&P herbicide (aminopyralid + 2,4-D) is the most complete broadleaf weed solution available for rangeland and pastures. ForeFront R&P advances the control provided by aminopyralid even further by expanding the weed control spectrum. ForeFront™ R&P herbicide is a great option for improving pasture production and utilization where limited by multiple broadleaf weed species. You still get outstanding emerged and residual control of thistles, knapweeds, and other noxious and invasive species, but you'll also get excellent results on annual broomweed, ragweeds, western ironweed, vervain, common mullein, curlycup gumweed, absinth wormwood and more. Like Milestone, ForeFront R&P carries no grazing restrictions for any type of livestock,¹ it's not a federally Restricted Use Pesticide (2,4-D state restrictions may apply)² and it can be applied up to the water's edge.

For more information on these new herbicides, contact your area Range & Pasture Specialist or visit www.RangeAndPasture.com.

¹Restrictions do apply to the transfer of grazing animals to sites intended to grow sensitive crops. Refer to the label for a complete list of transfer restrictions.

²Some states require an individual be licensed if involved in the recommendation, handling or application of any pesticide. Consult your local extension office for information regarding licensing requirements.

This, unfortunately, is a bit of a catch-22. Drought slows or stops growth of weeds and grasses, making treatment timing more difficult. However, left untreated, weakened pastures become vulnerable to weeds that pop up quickly and dominate forages when rains return. That can make pasture recovery a slow road. Adjusting your treatment timing during drought can help you produce more forage through the dry times and help speed postdrought pasture recovery.

"We're really happy with the results we've seen from Milestone in the spring, so I think that's what we're going to go with now," Eilert says.

Besides thistles and common mullein, Eilert also works tirelessly to keep



Common mullein is a biennial that blots out grass with a large rosette of thick, fuzzy leaves during the first year of growth. Then, in the second season, it produces a single, stout, upright stem that can reach 2 to 6 feet tall.

eastern redcedars from gaining a foothold in his pastures. Using a skid steer-mounted cutter and a chain saw, Eilert strives to clear at least one pasture of young cedars per year.

"We've done pasture treatments and improvements for 30 or 40 years now," Eilert says. "Dad was never reluctant to spray grass. It's an expense, but it keeps the grass growing and improves the land overall, and that pays off in the end."

It's a lesson in stewardship that Eilert likely will pass to the next generation — his son, Brad, and son-in-law, Creig Gengler — looking to make a living on the Kansas Plains. ■