



National Bison Association

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Combined Regional Issues Paper – South

Herd Health

- **Vaccination schedules**
- ***Dodge City, KS***
 - What? Vaccinations include Pasturella, Pyramid 5 with Presponse upon entry, and again in 30 days with a booster plus blackleg.
 - When? As stated. The cow herds receive a Pasturella booster annually.
 - Why? Control shipping fever type respiratory issue influx as well as quarantine for a time before mingling.
 - How? Through chute, injectable
- ***Mart, TX:***
 - What? – Outside of internal parasites, we treat for Blackleg.
 - When? – Treatment is done at the same time as we perform our parasite injections, usually in the Jan or Feb timeframe. Currently we run the bison thru the chutes 1 time per year and we treat via cubes 2 times, once in the spring and once in the summer.
 - Why? – Blackleg can negatively impact health bison and death can happen very quickly, usually within 12-48 hours from the time the bison ingest the bacterial spores while grazing.
 - How? – We have our Vet come out and apply the medications via injection.
- ***Dadeville, MO:***
 - We do injection vaccinations once per year (November to January) when working the animals and separating the calves to vaccinate for problems common to cattle in our area. We also use this time to have the vet check for any health issues he might see with the herd. We vaccinate for respiratory issues with a killed vaccine. Also we used to vaccinate for Black Leg but discovered this might be problematic if the calves had been exposed to it. We lost 3 calves this year in the chute and after a field necropsy and consulting with several bison vets, we stopped vaccinating for it. This is probably one of those things where we need a LOT more bison research.
- ***Cookeville, TN:***
 - When? Twice a Year but need to go to 3 or 4 times year.
 - Why? Wet Weather
 - How? Vet

- **Parasite control**
- ***Dodge City, KS***
 - What? Depends on year, disease level presence, and spread of infection.
 - When? Fall working, and possibly in spring if needed according to sample EPG count and coproculture.
 - Why? We want to control parasites adequately without building a resistance.
 - How? Target the drug used to combat resistance buildup, utilize the wormer best suited for the disease level specie present, and with the product best suited for success of control and best suited for application, calendar month, and animal condition. In other words different drugs, different methods, different administrations for different times of the year.
- ***Mart, TX:***
 - What? – We treat for internal parasites, especially Haemonchus and Ostertagia.
 - When? – Currently we treat thru the chutes once annually, around Jan or Feb. However, I am looking at moving to a twice per year treatment, once in November and once in March. In March we would use LongRange in the treatment. Based on fecal samples, sometimes we have to treat specific animals that have high egg counts with a dewormer via dart gun.
 - Why? – Internal parasites can have a negative impact on bison health and can lead to death.
 - How? – We have out Vet come out and apply the medications via injection.
- ***Dadeville, MO***
 - We use a mineral supplement that contains garlic year round now to act as a pre-probiotic and help with fly control. During our annual vaccination time, we use injectable cydectin. (We used to use Long Range but no longer use it because of its impact on dung beetles and our Audubon Certification.) We follow up with Safeguard Pellets as a booster after 3-4 months. We also use frequent pasture rotation to manage parasites as well as fecal testing. We are transitioning to managing parasites on a per animal basis rather than continuing to treat the entire herd. So we spot check all the herds and then test individual animals who might be demonstrating problems.
- ***Cookeville, TN:***
 - What? LongRange 7way, plus a pour on Cydectin plus Mineral with Garlic
 - When? April and November
 - Why? Parasites Bad
- **Mineral supplementation**
- ***Dodge City, KS***
 - What? Mineral selection is targeted for the region each herd is located. Do the science. One mineral ingredients label does not fit all locales.
 - When? Year round with different composition for different needs concerning animal needs and the calendar month.

- Why? See what and why
- How? Typically loose mineral. Some can be infused into feed if applicable.
- **Mart, TX:**
 - What? – We put out a Purina Molasses tub for the bison as well as loose minerals in a tub
 - When? – We have both of them in the pasture at all times to be consumed as wanted
 - Why? – To try and ensure the bison are getting enough minerals
 - How? – Both are in tubs and the bison can lick or eat whenever they wish
- **Dadeville, MO**
 - We use a local mineral person who has custom blended a mineral mix for us based on soil and water samples as well as liver samples we send in after processing. We add this mineral mix to our Audubon approved mix of soy hull pellets and cotton seed mill. They also have free choice access to this mineral mix in their feeders.
- **Cookeville, TN:**
 - What? Bison 90
 - When? year round
 - Why? for Mineral and copper
 - How? Loose have Mineral bins
- **Animals units/stocking rates**
- **Dodge City, KS**
 - What? Best method would be to measure your biomass and figure your available tonnage to determine your available feed to determine your animal units. Void your ability to do that, typically a good rule of thumb would be the USDA/NRCS stocking rate for your county, divided by 2 for year round grazing.
 - When? Year round for cow/calf operations or seasonal for short term yearling grazing.
 - Why? To ensure a take half leave half ideal, so as to ensure not overgrazing your pastures.
 - How? Continual observation and/or a method of measurement to ensure rest and rehab.
- **Mart, TX:**
 - What? – On our 50 acres we normally run about 12 adult bison
 - When? – year-round, with calves we sometimes increase to 16 bison
 - Why? – We have good grasses, and according to the Texas A&M AgriLife people, I could have more bison on my 50 acres due to my good grasses. Buy I would rather be understocked in preparation for lack of rain or poor grasses.
- **Weaning**
- **Dadeville, MO**

- We “wean” calves around 8-9 months at the time we separate them when we have our annual working. We do this to get the calves ready for starter herd customers and allow the mothers to get ready for the next calving season.
- **Cookeville, TN:**
 - What? Wean calves at 10 Months
 - When? Feb or March
 - Why? Ready for new Babies

Grazing/Feeding

- **Grass selection/management**
- **Dodge City, KS**
 - What? We prefer to utilize pastures that are native or attempt to restore pastures back to as close as we can get to native growth for the region and locale in question.
 - When? If you are using a combination of warm and cool season parcels, pay particular attention to the normal cycle of dormancy and growth rate per calendar month.
 - Why? Because this synergy between native pasture and bison was perfected years ago by a higher power. Our attempts to mitigate or improve upon that original plan have proven challenging at best. It can maybe be done, but at what cost?
 - How? Bison do a great job of managing and rotating pasture all by themselves. Rotational grazing: I’m a firm believer in the power of the rotational grazing, rest and rehab cycle as it pertains to generating a better quality and quantity forage base. We utilize what is available. In some instances our pastures consist of all native grass that requires very little intervention by us. In others, management can be minor to intensive. Especially where pastures are being restored and where cover crops are inserted to augment volume and numbers of animals.
 - Feeding is done in a manner to utilize pasture or cover crop fields along with commercial feeding. The animals are able to regulate what they want to eat when they want it. It works well with their natural selection of grass, grains, grazing, and foraging they would be doing if left to their own devices. Understanding their nutritional needs and desires is key to finding a balance between what they want and what quality of product you want in the end.
- **Mart, TX:**
 - What? – We have native grasses as well as Coastal Bermuda
 - When? – Grasses grow very well from March thru November. We normally bring in hay starting in November and end in February.
 - Why? – supplemental feeding
 - How? – purchase from local rancher
- **Dadeville, MO**
 - We have a great deal of fescue in Missouri and have been working on converting several pastures to a native prairie mix. We utilize strategic pasture rotation and try to do as much stockpiling of grass as we can. We also plant various cover crops for grazing and hay. We utilize a precision fertilizing program offered by our local coop (MFA) that

utilizes soil testing and geo mapping to only fertilize what is actually needed in each pasture.

- ***Cookeville, TN:***

- What? Different kinds grass; clover, fescue, plus I keep hay out year round
- When? May when I fertilize, I put seed in with the fertilize to help reseed
- Why? Keep the grasses growing
- How? I put 400# triple 19 on hay fields and 300# triple 19 on pasture

- **Rotational Grazing**

- ***Dodge City, KS***

- What? I believe all too often the wrong message is received at these schools. In my opinion the take home value is, the better quality and quantity available to the proper amount of animals, is much more valid than, the mindset that since I'm raising more grass, I can have more animals. I see a huge disconnect there.
- When? Time on grass is dependent on size of paddock and number of animal lbs. Most folks easily understand the rest cycle between grazing periods. However, just as if not more important, is the rehab of that grass and soil between grazing cycles.
- Why? To ensure grass regrowth, root reserve quality, moisture retention, proper PH, and soil microbial viability.

- ***Dadeville, MO***

- Animals are rotated based on pasture health to ensure the most recovery and regrowth. Native prairie is grazed based on requirements of NRSC or Audubon. Our sections of land are divided into individual pastures that allow us to simply open a gate to the new pasture and close the gate behind.

- ***Cookeville, TN:***

- When? I usually rotate every 2 to 3 weeks
- Why? ground rest
- How? I drive the pasture ever day

- **Water**

- ***Dodge City, KS***

- What? Fresh water preferred.
- When? 24/7
- Why? Health and welfare of animals related to disease and parasite mitigation or control measures.
- How? Moving streams, windmill or hydrant and fresh water tanks preferred in that order. Ponds (small ponds) least desirable for above reasons.

- **Fencing**
- *Dadeville, MO*
 - We adhere to the “happy fence” philosophy that basically says as long as the animals have what they need within the fence, they won’t want to go beyond the fence. We utilize 5 strand barbed wire with 7’ T posts on our exterior fences and 4 strand barbed wire with 6’ T posts in cross fences. We have tried to add electric to both the top and bottom but the local deer population tends to ensure this is NOT a good idea. They are constantly jumping it and tearing it down. Whatever you use for gates needs to be “tight” because we have found the gates are what the bulls (especially young ones) love to do battle with!
 - We also found a great way to convert cattle fencing on the exterior fences by adding 7’ T posts in between the shorter T posts and running an additional strand of barbed wire across the top.
- **Cookeville, TN:**
 - What? Regular cattle fence with some cable fence
 - Why? I figure the only way bison won’t out if hungry or spooked so keep plenty to eat and nothing around here spooks them

Business Planning

- **Developing/monitoring a business plan**
- ***Mart, TX:***
 - What? – We have a business plan in place for our very small bison operation
 - When? – We created it before we started the business and update it about every 6 months
 - Why? – To make sure we are current on our goals
 - How? – Keep it on my laptop (MS Word)
- ***Dadeville, MO***
 - We recommend spending a significant amount of time thinking through a business plan and making sure it matches who you are as a person. For example, we knew that direct to consumer sales was NEVER something we wanted to venture into. So, who you are as a person needs to drive the business direction as much as anything else. Finding a template such as that in the Bison Producers Handbook is very helpful and using published industry data will be instrumental if requesting financing from a bank or credit union. The business plan needs to be more than a single year, but a 2-3 year projection with the best estimates you can make in regard to the market.
 - A business plan is also a “living document” that you need to manage to on a regular basis. This management would involve keeping the financial books up to date so you can tell at any given time where you are and if you need to make any adjustments. You should also not be afraid to modify the business plan when it appears you need to go a different direction based on either the market or personal situations. The changes need to be intentional though and lead to a revision of the actual business plan.

- Involve your workers in the process and perhaps provide rewards for the successful management of the plan. If they understand the big picture of what you are attempting to accomplish they are more likely to make better daily decisions.
- **Converting from a cattle operation:**
- ***Dodge City, KS***
 - This can be a very easy, relatively inexpensive process, depending on what's in place. Many places can be retrofitted to move bison through a system calmly, quietly, and safely for both human and animal. The bigger challenge is retrofitting the human to behave in a manner that is conducive for the buffalo.
 - What? Sheeting to black out areas in varying degrees, depending on pressure needs. Proper design of equipment to facilitate a smooth, calm, movement.
 - When? Preferably before you buy animals.
 - Why? As stated above. If your animals are stressed out, irritable, angry, piling up in the corner, etc., you probably need a combination of equipment change and/or people behavior change. The animal anxiety likely started before they were in the tighter spaces of the working facility.
 - How? Changing some equipment, paradigms, mindset, and behavior.
- **Starting from scratch**
- ***Mart, TX:***
 - What? - We moved to the Waco, TX area for the purpose of starting our small bison ranch. We had never been in the Ag business prior to starting our small ranch.
 - When? – We got our first bison in March of 2018.
 - Why? – A strong passion for bison and a desire for rural living. This was going to be my retirement gig. Some people like golf, boating or sports cars – my passion was bison ranching
 - How? – Thru education sources from the NBA and joining / attending Texas Bison Association functions I felt equipped to being our ranch
- ***Dadeville, MO***
 - We started our operation from scratch with very little background in agriculture. So our business model is centered around helping people who want to get into the bison business by selling starter herds. Our pricing involves membership in both the NBA and a state/regional bison association and the first thing we ask them to do is get the Bison Producer's Handbook and read it. We also recommend they visit as many different ranches as the can and attend association events. We also recommend they connect with a local vet and make sure to take the time to visit with their neighbors about their plans to raise bison. We also provide assistance throughout the entire process – directing them to resources in their geographical area (such as their local extension and NRSC office) to help them get started and supporting them after the animals are delivered.

Marketing

- **Agritourism**
- ***Dodge City, KS***
 - What? Learn your audience. Often a setting where your animals are grazing elicits questions that the audience wants to hear.
 - When?
 - Why? One program does not interest everyone.
 - How? Using safety and common sense concerning where and how your visitors are interacting with the bison.
- ***Cookeville, TN:***
 - What? We have tours and meat sales
 - When? year round
 - Why? We love to talk about our bison
 - How? We have Facebook page
- **Carcass cuts/marketing strategies**
- ***Cookeville, TN:***
 - What? We have all different cuts for people to choose
 - When? Year round
 - Why? More and More people liking it
 - How? We use a FDA Slaughter
- ***Dadeville, MO***
 - We use a USDA facility and process year round. We did not intend to get into the meat business selling starter herds but obviously we will always have bulls leftover. I have found that simpler cuts work better for us. We sell “bison bundles” that are priced strategically and involve specific cuts and market them through a local grocery. Consumers tend to like these because they know exactly what cuts they are getting and we are able to sell the entire animal by strategically combining cuts.
- **Regional marketing strategies**
- ***Dodge City, KS:***
 - What? Find a market untapped in your area.
 - Why? Because we are too small to compete. If you make your own market, what’s good for you, is good for me, and vice versa.
 - How? Make your own way instead of pirating what others have started.
- ***Mart, TX:***
 - What? – We run a cow/calf operation and I have been successful selling my animals via the Texas Bison Assoc. and NBA websites
 - When? – Usually about 8 months after birth of the calves
 - Why? – The NBA and TBA websites help me reach qualified buyers
 - How? – Thru the TBA and NBA websites

- **Marketing to foodservice**
- ***Dadeville, MO***
 - We are just beginning to market to wholesalers and have found that old fashioned networking is still a very effective way for us to market. Being Audubon Certified is beginning to provide a channel into several different markets for us and Social Media is VERY important just to keep our name in front of people. Cross marketing has also resulted in a few sales as well. I think this is probably a method we will utilize more frequently in the future.
- ***Dodge City, KS***
 - What? Understand what their expectations are. Educate them to what your capabilities are.
 - Why? Because they have been doing business for a very long time through suppliers that have multiple boxes of everything they want on hand. Changing their mind has never been a challenge. Changing their mind from T-Bones to now KC strips and fillets, is a little late after the carcass has been processed.
 - How? Learn how these animals are put together so you know how they'll come apart. Communicate
- **Marketing Direct to consumer**
- ***Dodge City, KS***
 - What? Retail if you have time and a store front. Bundles, bulk, quarters and sides are the best way to move volume.
 - When?
 - Why? This is one of the best untapped markets out there.
 - How? Concentrate on what makes your product desirable, not why other product is a worse choice. Tell your story to enhance an already popular product.

Local resources/infrastructure

- ***Dodge City, KS***
 - What? USDA, NRCS, Extension are all good resources for various help. Programs are valuable, but be sure they allow you to retrofit the program to bison needs. Sometimes the minutia and dotted I's and crossed T's can get in the way of your goals.
 - When? Visit up front and help them to understand that making some changes to the designs and locations of pipelines, watering areas, cross fences, etc, will enable you to be successful implementing their programs instead of being frustrated and scrapping the project.
 - Why? Because we aren't dealing with domestic stock. Many of their programs will work very well for bison, *if* allowances are made to retrofit the designs and timelines.
 - How? Open honest communication.
- ***Dadeville, MO***
 - We have been able to take advantage of several NRSC, EQIP programs and we recommend them to anyone purchasing starter herds from us. We refer them to their local agency and suggest they use them as a resource in regard to stocking rates, etc.

We have utilized cross fencing and watering programs as well as programs to convert pastures into native prairie.

- **Handling equipment design**

- ***Dodge City, KS***

- What? As stated in cattle conversion. Getting rid of the cattle equipment design and mentality.
- When? It's never too late.
- Why? Because continuing down the same path will get you the same results. If you can get through your annual workings without injury, anxiety, bloodshed, and the same for your animals, maybe you're good as is. If not, then that's why.

- ***Dadeville, MO***

- The area of the country we live in does not have a great amount of contiguous acreage available, so our business model allows for several herds on separate sections of land. This model utilizes a portable working system we purchased from Morand. Each section of land with a herd has a central hub corral system that we attach the actual working system to (lead up pens, tub, alley and chute).

- **Veterinarian – Care and Feeding of**

- ***Dodge City, KS***

- What? We do most of our own veterinary work. Disease mitigation to form a treatment plan, pregnancy checking, OCV, and health papers is where we utilize our vets
- When? Annually at weaning, selling time, and as needed.
- Why? I don't need to pay them to stand around and give shots and ear tag.

- ***Dadeville, MO***

- We consider our veterinarian a partner in our business and treat him with a great deal of respect. First and foremost – he always gets paid as soon as the bill shows up! We also work very hard to ensure the working environment is safe and efficient and working our animals is something he and his team actually look forward to. Providing lunch for them afterward is always a great time to show appreciation and build relationship.

- **Processor relations**

- ***Dodge City, KS***

- What? This business is about relationships. Working with your processor to benefit you both, keeping your appointments, and doing the things that attract you as a customer, will pay dividends in the long run.
- When? Promptly
- Why? So you're not a pain in their ass.
- How? Pay your bills, pick up your meat in a timely manner, and above all, help them to design or fabricate equipment to facilitate easy handling that incorporates your animals as well as others. If you provide equipment, manpower, and assistance making their plant better for you and for them, you just endeared yourself to your processor. They will try hard to accommodate you.

