

Ranch Review: Shepherd Farms

Dan and Janet Shepherd — Clifton Hill, Missouri

Jerrell and Evelyn Shepherd — Clifton Hill, Missouri

A consistent money maker for Shepherd Farms has been our buffalo operation. We started in 1970 with a large bottomland farm with enough hill ground that we needed a livestock enterprise. Deciding that it would be difficult to make a profit year after year with cattle, we turned to the prospect of raising buffalo. Dad (Jerrell) had always wanted a few around just to look at. After doing some checking with some other buffalo producers, we thought it may be worth a try. So in the middle of that winter, we went to an auction at Custer State Park in South Dakota to buy ten or twelve head. That would be enough to give us some experience, then later we would buy more. The day began with a temperature of 32° below. By sale time, it warmed up to 26° below with a strong 30 mile an hour wind. The sale happened to be outside. After about 15 minutes, there were about six of us left bidding. The buffalo were selling a hundred dollars per head below regular pricing. Instead of buying 12 as originally planned, we started in a big way with 56 head. Our herd has grown to over 400 buffalo.

Shepherd Farms is located on Highway 24, fifteen miles west of Moberly at the small town of Clifton



Hill. Our acreage numbers over 3100. Much of this is pasture and hay, with 200 acres in pecan trees and about 300 acres of very high-protein warm season grass called eastern gramagrass. This will supply much of our buffalo forage in the future.

Some of the main differences of our operation compared to others are dehorning all the cows, two trips a year through the corral, using two-year old bulls to do all the breeding, creep feeding calves, production testing yearling bulls and heifers, flushing cows during breeding season, and positive ID on all animals.

Ten years ago we decided to dehorn all of our females. At first I had mixed emotions, but it did not take me long to see it was the way to go. Most of the older cows had a horn broken off or bent down. Since we have no bears or wolves in Missouri, they don't need them except to hurt each other so off they went. Some of the cows were close to 30 years old. We did not have one problem at all. Now when we work them, they don't hurt one another. Besides I think the cows look

much better. At one time we had some bulls dehorned. Being the dominant bulls in the herd, they did not need them.

Each animal on the farm goes at least twice through the corral within a year, mainly for worm shots, ear tags, sorting and weighing.

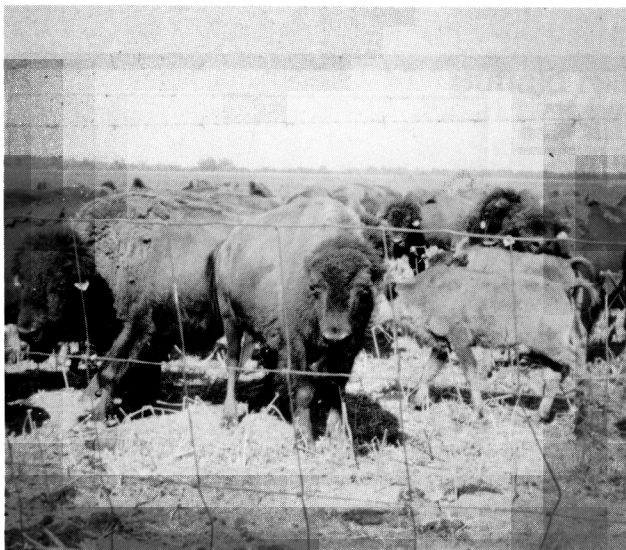
The use of 2-year old bulls for breeding has been very successful in our operation. In 1988, we used 2-year old bulls for all the breeding. My 1989 calf crop was just as good as when using older bulls.

With the older bulls, we ran 1 bull to 12-14 cows. Now it's 8 cows to a young bull. In October, we sort the bulls from the herd and they go on full feed. The best ones are sold as breeding bulls to other producers and the remaining ones are slaughtered for meat, which is still prime eating. Also a 2-year old is ten times easier to work with than the older bulls. Most of my problems with gates and fencing were caused by the older bulls. Now I don't have these problems. There has been some concern that some 2-year olds are not fertile. But by using them, we hope to raise earlier maturing animals.

I have found that creep feeding the calves in the winter has paid off at weaning time. They know what grain is and one or two weeks before weaning we can start them on medication.

All of our yearling bulls and heifers are weight gain tested in March. We weigh all the calves. In September we reweigh them. Over the past six years we have seen a great difference in the animals. Some of the bull calves that look outstanding will sometimes finish in the middle of the group. Our bulls are mainly selected on weight gain unless there is something major physically wrong. The heifers are selected the same way.

The past three years we have started flushing our cows before and during breeding season. Flushing is feeding range cubes at 20% protein, 2 pounds per head, per day. It has raised



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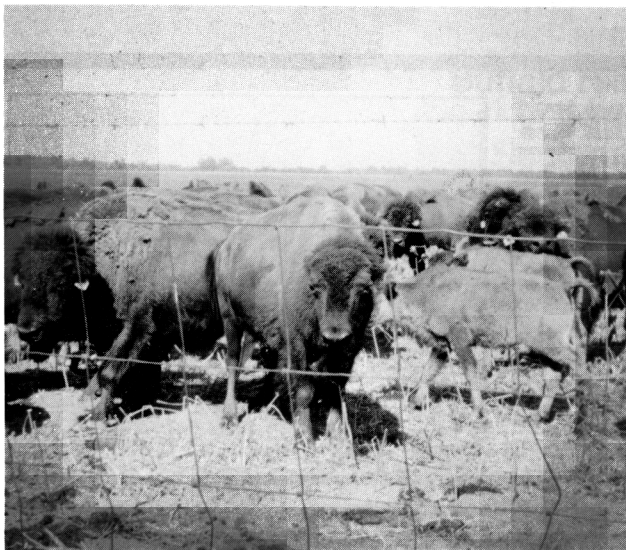
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The past three years we have started flushing our cows before and during breeding season. Flushing is feeding range cubes at 20% protein, 2 pounds per head, per day. It has raised



our calf crop from 75% to 85-90%. So far about \$30.00 per head, per year. It pays off very well. It also makes the cows easier to move from pasture to pasture.

Records are kept on each animal with the cows having two ear tags of the same number and their calfhood tag number. We record the cow number when the calf is born. When the calf is tagged in the fall, we match them with the cows. It lets us see which cows are producing the better calves and the ones that are not. We hope to have a computer program in the near future that can speed this up.

The following is a calendar of events that we use in Missouri. Although it works for us, it may not for everyone. I hope it will give you some helpful ideas.

January—Last years calves are with mothers on winter pasture. Calves on creep feed, cows on hay. Yearlings are on pasture with hay and a small amount of grain.

February—Cows passed through corral and wormed. Calves are

weaned then. Calves are on medication for three(3) weeks then turned out to pasture with grain and hay.



March—Cows are still on winter pasture. Calves are weighed, wormed and sorted. Bulls are on one farm and heifers on another to prevent heifers from calving at 2 years old. Go to N.B.A. Convention.

April—Cows moved to clean pasture to calve in.

May—Move cows to summer pasture.

June—Add the 2-year old bulls and heifers to the cow herd. Start feeding range cubes to cow herd.

July/August—End feeding range cubes in August.

September—Move, worm and weigh yearling animals. Go to N.B.A. Convention.

October—Move cow herd to corral. Worm cows, calves and bulls. Ear tag calves, calfhood vaccinate heifers, sort bulls off and put on full feed.

November—Move cows to winter pasture.

December—Select herd bulls for breeding for next year. The rest go to feed pens. Sort replacement heifers and dehorn them. Sell rest or move to feeding pens.

On all the buffalo ages, they turn a year older on May 1 of every year.

This plan has worked very well for us. I hope you can pick something from it and try it out for your own operation.



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Clifton Hill, Missouri

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Contact: Dan Shepherd
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Clifton Hill, MO 65244
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