Editorial

It Pays to Graze Correctly

(Editor's Note: The Author pondered for some time how to present his theme that "it pays to have grass even though your operation is small". He decided he could best put his idea across by giving the experience of a small ranchman who has made a conservation grazing program pay.)

As SOUTHWESTERN cattle ranches go, the spread operated by Arthur Blaschke in the liveoak savannahs of the Texas Hill Country northwest of San Antonio is a small one.

But Blaschke has a word of advice for all ranchmen, large or small.

"A lot of ranchers still believe that the only operators who can afford to have plenty of grass all the time are the ones who have big spreads and stacks of money in the bank. They seem to think a small ranchman can't afford a conservation grazing program because he has to graze heavily to make a living."

Then Blaschke makes his point: "It goes for the little operator as well as the big one; more net profit can be made from conservation grazing than from a method of grazing where the best forage plants are continually nubbed to the ground. I have tried it both ways—and I can't afford to be short of good grass."

Since he started his soil and water conservation program in 1946, Blaschke's grasslands have improved from poor and fair range condition to good and excellent condition. He used to feed his home-raised corn and oats as maintenance sup-

Blaschke's interest in grass improvement started when Dudley Mann, Soil Conservation Service District Conservationist, gave him some grass sweepings from the Service's San Antonio Nursery. A Spanish oak thicket was cleared with a hand axe and the cleared ¼ acre was fenced sheep-tight. The grass sweepings were scattered in the clearing. Only a little native grass was left. From the grass sweepings, plants of Rhodesgrass, King
Ranch bluestem, and slender grama grew the first year. Rhodesgrass died the next winter but King Ranch bluestem and slender grama continued to thrive. Native little and big bluestem, Indiangrass, and sideoats grama sprang up from tiny plants already there. The exclosure became a grass jungle and Blaschke saw that his rocky limestone range would produce far more native grass and King Ranch bluestem than he had believed possible.

When Blaschke decided to boost his grass crop he saw that the good native grasses on his range were few and far between. He said that the ground was so hard that a pony couldn’t make a track plain enough to see.

Blaschke’s grassland was already cross-fenced so that it was easy to work out a program of rests for part of the grass during the growing season each year. As a result of more lenient use and occasional rests, the bluestems, Indiangrass, and sideoats grama began spreading into openings from the protective live oak mottes, where they had survived during the heavy grazing period. Several palatable native legumes and other good forbs thickened up too and now Blaschke has a good stand of productive animal-fattening plants. The heavy litter has accumulated for several years, and the soil is mellow and rain water soaks in easily.

“I used to run a few cows, a few sheep and a few goats when my range was in poor condition,” he said. “Cattle and goats are a good combination for my kind of country. Cattle do well on the bluestems and Indiangrass; the goats work the live oak sprouts as well as the grass. So I sold what few sheep I had in order to keep my grazing load in line with the grass yield. Now I get more pounds of animal products from my ranch with fewer animals than when I had more livestock than grass.”

Blaschke has no income except from ranching and he makes a good living. He has a modern well-kept home and his farm buildings are serviceable and substantial. His fences are good. He and his family live comfortably. He is out of debt.

Also he is a good neighbor. When the Kendall County Soil Conservation District was organized in 1946, he was one of the five landowners elected as supervisors of this very active soil conservation district. He was named secretary of this district.

The last two years have been dry in the Hill Country. On the droughtier sites some of the live oak and post oak have died. But on Blaschke’s ranch the bluestems and Indiangrass flowered out and made a little seed. The grasses did not grow high enough to hide the goats this year, but they reach above the knees of Arthur’s white-face cows. His livestock will make it through the winter on grass as usual.

Arthur knows the plants on his ranch that his animals like to eat. Also he can recognize them any time of the year. Blaschke takes great pride in what he knows about range plants. He knows that his animals can “have their grass and eat it” provided enough of the grass is left to protect the soil, and keep it thrifty and productive.

Anyone can use Blaschke’s system. It costs little and the reward is great. It’s as simple as this: Know grasses well enough to manage them right so they will yield more and livestock will do better. The soil then will be preserved and management costs will go down. The result is greater family and national security.—B. W. Allred, Chief, Regional Range Division, U. S. Soil Conservation Service, Fort Worth, Texas.