

Ranching with the Drought

HARRY ZAVISCH, Calliham Route, Tilden, Texas.

Ten years ago my ranch, which is near Tilden in McMullen County, was lush and green with an abundance of grass. I was using my fields as supplemental grazing, while deferring my pastures. But with three years of decreasing rainfall and five years of drought there was no supplemental grazing and little or no grass left. I tried

Harry Zavisch, with a family background of ranching extending back to colonial times, began his ranching career in 1932 with a few head of cattle and the down payment on 220 acres of land near Tilden, Texas. Over the years the ranch has been enlarged and improved, and now occupies 2,291 acres. In this article Harry tells how a program of range improvement based on brush control and reseeding helped him to survive the drought.

"My personal interests are my family and my ranch," he says. Harry is married and has two sons. In 1956 he was selected as the outstanding farmer-rancher in the Dos Rios Soil Conservation District, and he was awarded a bronze plaque by the Lions Clubs of Tilden and Cotulla.

to protect my range by reducing my herd. But the drought was ahead of me, and I was still overstocked. In fact, at times one cow would have overstocked my ranch.

I realized that in order to stay in the ranching business I would have to acquire more acreage or increase the productivity of my present holdings. There was no land available; therefore, I began to investigate all tried methods of brush control and range improvement.

Root Plowing

During my term as supervisor of the Dos Rios Soil Conservation Dis-

trict, I had seen the results of some of the first root plowing in this area. Upon further investigation I decided that this was the most suitable practice for my individual operation. The personnel of the Soil Conservation Service at Tilden supplied me with available information on root plowing and seeding.

During the drought my ranching operations were financed through the Production Credit Association and on contacting them, I found they fully approved and recommended the practice of root plowing.

In May of 1955, I hired Carl Lange to root plow and seed 160 acres of the most heavily infested brushland on my ranch. Blue panic grass was seeded on this land at the time of plowing at the rate of two pounds per acre, and then the land was deferred until November 1.

Benefits of Treatment

Upon completion of the seeding, a two-inch rain brought the grass

up to a fair stand. Only light showers fell during the hot summer months. Then in September a 1½-inch rain was received, enabling the grass to mature and seed.

This tract was then grazed by 60 head of cows and calves for a 45 day period, leaving sufficient stubble to protect the soil and to allow the grass to recover quickly with a small amount of rainfall.

The following June the same herd grazed for three months; yet only five inches of rain had fallen since the previous grazing period. During this time the unplowed rangeland remained bare.

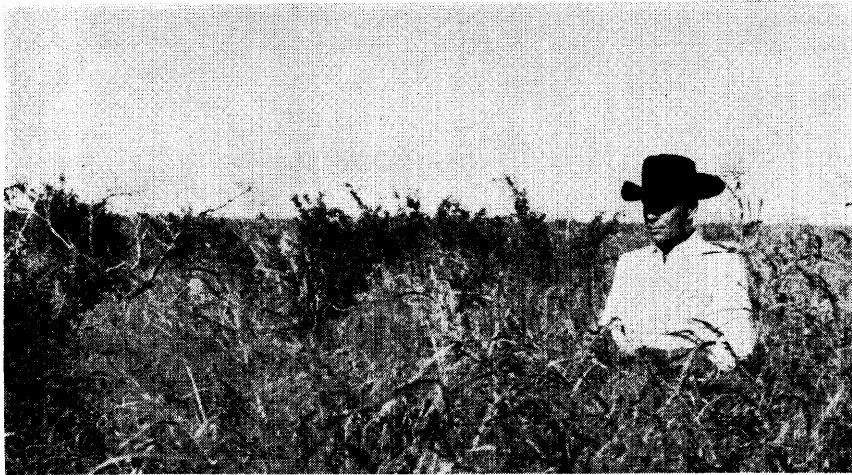
I was so well pleased with the results of my first root plowing that I have continued to root plow and seed more land each year. Up to the present time, 750 acres have been plowed and seeded. Cross fencing this land into 160 acre tracts enables me to defer or graze any portion by opening or closing wide gaps in the fencing.

Management After Plowing

In the future I plan to carry out a progressive program of brush control by root plowing and seeding the remainder of my 1,350 acres of rangeland as rapidly as condi-



Part of the Zavisch herd grazing blue panic grass on land that was root plowed and seeded in April and May of 1957. This picture was taken on July 11, 1957, by Carroll Joe Nichols.



Harry Zavisch examining seed on blue panic grass planted on root plowed land in August of 1956. The photo was taken in July, 1957, by Carroll Joe Nichols, Tilden, Texas.

tions permit. Grazing will be deferred on each tract for a full growing season following seeding, thereafter grass will be allowed to

seed at least once every two years. At least two pastures will be deferred each year, while using fields for supplemental grazing. Grazing on all pastures will be managed so as to leave enough stubble for the grass to recover quickly and for soil protection.

Root plowing followed by deferment pays off in an abundance of grass even during subnormal rainfall.

Conservation practices and good range management are essential to the future of the ranching industry in south Texas. Through these practices I have been able to stop erosion, control excessive runoff of rainfall, and obtain a good grass cover. Due to these improvements I will be able to more than double my herd by this fall.