

# Beef News July 2011

The cows are looking good. The dairy based cows are filling out nicely on the high quality pasture. The calves look like they are growing well. The Angus-Devon cows are huge and probably don't need the high quality forage but so far they have not had trouble calving.

The cow herd and sheep flock have started through the rotation again from the beginning. We are doing a little better at getting them on a rotation where we can get them from one pasture to the other easily. Most of the time we can get water by hose (although a long one) rather than having to haul the wagon with the water tank around. With a little creative fencing we can get the charge from one of the chargers in the barn. The battery charger works well but means putting in ground rods and setting things up.

I am surprised at the weeds the whole crew eats. The cows help knock down the big stuff while the sheep reach underneath and get the clover. The sheep also like things like burdocks. The last paddock had a lot of milkweed and I worried about them eating it all because it can be poisonous but it all disappeared with no ill effects. They have eaten everything but the thistles. It will be interesting to see what happens when they get back to the paddocks that have been clipped. Charlie also hayed off the two paddocks in the old sheep pasture. This is a great way to get rid of the sheep parasites that are on the pasture. I have seen a Red Tail Hawk hunting over the recently grazed pastures probably enjoying the exposed ground and easy access to rodents.

One advantage of constantly moving everything is that the water tanks get dumped and re-filled regularly so the water quality is good even in the hot summer. There is also less mud and flies around the watering area since it gets moved so often. One challenge has been finding a good way to serve loose minerals to the sheep and a trace mineral block to the cows.

One day recently we had two new calves born – the first calves born since we started the rotation with the sheep – one from a dairy beef cow and one to an Angus-Devon cross. Fortunately the cows did not get overly protective and chase the sheep. They were not very friendly to us when we ear tagged the calves but that was no surprise. We decided to tag the calves before we moved them to a new pasture where the calves would be hard to find. So after tagging we opened the fence and trailed them to the next paddock. The first calf lay down and would not move so the beef cow and calf hung out in limbo between paddocks for awhile. After we closed the fences back up the other mama dairy type cow appeared from over the hill. She had taken her calf after tagging and hidden it in the old pasture. We put her in the new pasture and the other calf and mama got themselves over there, too. However, we could not find the hidden calf. I went back about 4 hours later with Eugene and the “buggy” and we found that calf still asleep way in the far corner of the old pasture. Luckily Eugene could pick up the calf and held her on his lap all the way back to the other pasture. The calf just rode along very relaxed looking like a chunky black Labrador Retriever.. We put her in among the sheep. The other mama cow (not her mother) came and got her and took her back to the herd. The next day I really had to hunt to find the calves. It is amazing that a hundred pound jet black calf can disappear in a green field.

When sheep are lambing in a rotation you have to leave the recently lambing ewes behind and catch them up later. That is known as drift lambing. Similarly, we will have to be careful that any calves are accounted for as we move the cows through the rotation during calving and possibly be prepared to leave the pair behind for a day.