

Easier Winter? Graze Bales!

Let cows feed themselves to save fuel and time, enrich soils naturally.



Better soil fertility, fuel savings, easier winter ranch life

Rather than firing up a cold tractor most winter days to haul bales to cattle in a field or confined space, some ranchers are leaving bales made earlier in the year in the hayfield in place for winter feed, or hauling bales in the fall to strategic field locations. They let their livestock feed themselves, using electric fence to control where, when, and how many bales are grazed, along with the hayfield.

It's called bale grazing, and ranchers using the practice are finding unexpected benefits.



Bring Cows to the Bales: Instead of using fuel and time to haul bales to cattle in the winter, bales are left in the hayfield and cattle are rotated through the bales, moving electric fence wires from previously set posts to control amount of feed available. This bale grazing system saves time and fuel, builds better soil, and makes winter easier on cattlemen and their families.



Drew Anderson
Lemmon, SD

"I was burning 35 gallons of diesel a day to feed the cows without bale grazing. With bale grazing, it's only a dollar a day for the snowmobile. We place metal step-in posts before ground freezes, so we just string hot wire in the winter.



Bart Carmichael
Faith, SD

"We place bales on thinner soils and hilltops to add nutrients to improve those soils. We move electric fence wire--takes me 9 minutes to move a fence-- instead of starting a tractor every day."



Harold Gaugler
Grant Co., ND

"We've seen almost a third higher hay production, by increased nitrogen from cow urine and manure. We graze into the wind; we've seen cows use the bales as windbreaks in a snowstorm."

NDSU research takeaways on bale grazing

- Grass production increased with bale grazing, with enhanced crude protein and phosphorus content
- Soil nitrate, phosphorus and potassium levels higher at 0-6" depths
- No evidence of compacted soil from cattle

Tips for newcomers from experienced ranchers

- Start small, with a few bales for a short time, the first year
- A cordless drill and masonry bit could be used in a pinch to set posts in frozen soil
- Sisal twine biodegrades and works well on bales
- Hay will grow through most of the bale residue
- Any bales not grazed can be banked for another year
- Have a backup plan for severe weather— frozen water, snow so heavy cows can't get to bales, need for more shelter



GROWING RESILIENCE
THROUGH OUR SOILS