

Cattle company focuses on regenerative grazing

Aimed at healing damaged grassland

By MICHAEL KOHN
The Bulletin

SISTERS — Regenerative grazing has become a recent buzzword among social media savvy ranchers and is seen as an eco-friendly way to produce beef. The Sisters Cattle Co. is out to prove the hype really can help central Oregon’s grasslands.

Hobbs Magaret, the 34-year-old owner of the fledgling company, is raising beef cattle in Sisters in a way that not only avoids all chemicals, fertilizers and corn, but also leaves the grazing fields in a healthier state compared to when he started, using only cows to improve the land.

As unlikely as that sounds, his method of ranching — regenerative grazing — is becoming more widespread in the U.S. and other countries. After just 18 months in production, Magaret said he has improved 200 acres of land in the Sisters area.

What’s regenerative grazing? It’s a method of raising livestock that not only produces food for people but also regenerates grassland that has been degraded by extractive practices or poor land management.

The practice was pioneered more than 50 years ago in Zimbabwe and South Africa but only experienced widespread growth in the past decade. It began with the notion that large numbers of grazing animals, such as buffalo and cattle, help improve the health of a grassland simply by slowly grazing across it. Together they push large amounts of biomass (roots, grass seeds, excrement) into the earth, improving soil health.

Regenerative grazers such as Magaret do this by grouping their animals closely together in one section of a pasture and then move them once that section is depleted. The moves usually happen two or three times a day to mimic the movements of wild grazers. Portion by portion, the entire field gets fully and equally grazed and naturally fertilized. Magaret uses electrified wires to act as small paddocks to keep his cows in certain areas until it’s time to move again.

The benefits of regenerative grazing include increased diversity of plant, animal and microbial life, said Scott Duggan, an assistant professor with Oregon State University’s College of Agricultural Sciences. Duggan said it also reduces soil erosion and has the potential for increased carbon sequestration. It is utilized and is currently being practiced in other parts of central Oregon, he said.

“Doc and Connie Hatfield were pioneering regenerative grazing on their



ranch in Brothers, Oregon, starting in the late 1970s,” said Duggan.

For Magaret, this grazing method also forces his cows to chew through a greater variety of grass types. The upshot is that the cattle ingest a more varied diet while also preventing overgrazing.

“If there were no wires, they would have access to the entire pasture, they would go around and select the best items, and the items that are not as delicious would be ignored, then they would hit the delicious items again when they pop up, until they kill them. So the desirable, native grasses would be overgrazed and killed,” Magaret said.

Magaret said he is interested in finding areas that are degraded and improving them. He works with local landowners in Sisters and grazes his cattle on their fields.

“Better soil means better forage. More forage means for cattle, so that becomes a positive feedback loop,” Magaret said. “The other part is that carbon in the soil is good. In the last 100 years, we have lost 70% of the carbon that was stored in the soil, it has gone into the air, it is particularly from overgrazing and tillage agriculture.”

He is also interested in raising cattle in a stress-free environment. Bunching them together in a close herd, he said, is one way to decrease stress.

“They are happier than the cows in big pastures,” he said. “It might seem counterintuitive, but they are herd animals — for millions of years they developed a protection mechanism, which is to stay close together. That protection mechanism soothes them when they have a whole group protecting them, and they calm down.”

Magaret’s approach to the slaughter and butcher

‘I WANT TO PUT CARBON IN THE GROUND AND TAKE CARBON OUT OF THE AIR. I WANT TO CREATE MORE BIODIVERSITY AND MAKE MORE FERTILE GRASSLANDS.’

Hobbs Magaret | owner of Sisters Cattle Co.



Photos by Ryan Brennecke/The Bulletin
TOP: Cows graze closely together in a field near Sisters. **ABOVE:** Hobbs Magaret, owner of Sisters Cattle Co., walks through a field near Sisters where he has implemented regenerative grazing practices.

of his animals also diverges from the norm. While most beef producers truck their cattle to a slaughterhouse for U.S. Department of Agriculture inspection and slaughter, Magaret has them slaughtered on the farm, believing this method to be less stressful for the animal.

“There is no suffering. No taking them to a strange location. No being around strange smells or sights. No being on trailer, none of that,” Magaret said.

USDA inspection for on-farm slaughter is unavailable in central Oregon, so Magaret must do a so-called custom-exempt slaughter. This means that

the cow (or a portion of the cow) must be pre-sold to buyers prior to slaughter. “I am not against inspec-

tion by USDA, but I don’t want to take the animal to a place where it can be inspected while it’s being slaughtered, that’s a terrifying situation for the animal,” Magaret said.

After the body is turned into a carcass by the butcher, the leftover parts — including the feet, skull and organs — are placed in a pit with woodchips for composting.

“Within a couple of months, there is nothing left,” Magaret said.

The carcass then hangs in a butcher shop for three weeks, after which it’s cut-to-order and wrapped. Central Oregon buyers must pick up their order at Cinder Butte Meat Co. in Redmond. For Willamette Valley buyers, the meat is trucked over the mountains to a designated location for pick up.

For now, the custom-exempt slaughter method prevents Magaret from selling smaller cuts of beef.

The smallest purchase is 100 pounds or a quarter of a cow. The estimated cost for beef comes out to around \$10 per pound. Magaret advises his customers to have a large stand-up freezer in order to store that much meat.

Magaret has been publicizing his grazing practices on social media and has a strong following on Tik-

Tok. Part of his marketing includes eco-friendly practices and his limited use of fossil fuels in his business.

“Now we have 7.5 billion people on the planet, and when fossil fuels run out how are we going to feed all those people? I am doing my best to try to answer that question,” Magaret said.

Reaction to regenerative grazing in Sisters is mixed. Matt Cyrus, president of the Deschutes County Farm Bureau, said even after grazing, some additional fertilizer will be needed for the ground.

“The reality is that it (regenerative grazing) is going to be a net loss of soil over time,” Cyrus said. “The fact that the animals come off the ground, you end up with a net loss, if the cow eats 20 pounds of grass, they don’t put 20 pounds of manure out the backside, they have converted part of that to energy, part of that has gone to muscle and fat development, a certain percentage has been expended to survive.”

“What Hobbs is doing is a cool idea and awesome for marketing but nothing is long-term, sustainable without some outside input, you are still going to need to fertilize that ground in some fashion,” Cyrus added.

Others in Sisters and around central Oregon just see Magaret’s business as a way to get hold of locally-produced, grass-fed steaks. The company has 60 customers and a short waiting list for others who want to join. Magaret dreams of one day opening his own butcher shop in order to sell individual steaks and other meats in smaller amounts. But that is still likely a few years away.

For now, Magaret is content to be building a business that intertwines ranching and the environment, which are often at odds.

“I want to put carbon in the ground and take carbon out of the air. I want to create more biodiversity and make more fertile grasslands,” Magaret said. Regenerative grazing “will build a bridge between ranching and the environmental community.”

SEVEN-DAY FORECAST FOR ASTORIA

TODAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY
58 53	60 54	57 44	52 39	51 36	50 34	47 39
Breezy with rain	Windy with rain	Rain	Cloudy	Showers possible	Rain	Sun, then clouds

ALMANAC

Astoria through Sunday

Temperatures

High/low	64/39
Normal high/low	57/42
Record high	71 in 1969
Record low	25 in 1935
Precipitation	
Sunday	0.00"
Month to date	0.00"
Normal month to date	0.30"
Year to date	46.39"
Normal year to date	46.77"

Forecasts and graphics provided by
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UNDER THE SKY

Tonight’s Sky: Waning gibbous moon above Aldebaran of Taurus, the Bull.

Source: Jim Todd, OMSI

SUN AND MOON

Sunrise today 7:00 a.m.
Sunset tonight 4:58 p.m.
Moonrise today 6:53 p.m.
Moonset today 10:01 a.m.

Last	New	First	Full
Nov 8	Nov 14	Nov 21	Nov 30

TODAY’S TIDES

Astoria / Port Docks	Time	High (ft.)	Time	Low (ft.)
2:56 a.m.	6.8	8:21 a.m.	2.9	
1:54 p.m.	8.3	9:07 p.m.	-0.2	
Cape Disappointment				
2:26 a.m.	6.8	7:32 a.m.	3.2	
1:40 p.m.	8.0	8:16 p.m.	-0.2	
Hammond				
2:43 a.m.	7.0	7:53 a.m.	2.9	
1:49 p.m.	8.3	8:38 p.m.	-0.5	
Warrenton				
2:51 a.m.	7.2	8:05 a.m.	3.0	
1:49 p.m.	8.7	8:51 p.m.	-0.1	
Knappa				
3:33 a.m.	7.1	9:22 a.m.	2.5	
2:31 p.m.	8.5	10:08 p.m.	-0.1	
Depoe Bay				
1:44 a.m.	7.1	6:58 a.m.	3.5	
12:50 p.m.	8.5	7:47 p.m.	-0.1	

NATIONAL CITIES

City	Today	Wed.
Atlanta	65/44/s	69/47/s
Boston	44/30/c	51/46/s
Chicago	61/47/s	64/50/s
Dallas	75/51/s	75/57/pc
Denver	74/46/pc	72/46/s
Honolulu	87/76/pc	86/74/pc
Houston	75/50/s	77/57/s
Los Angeles	80/59/pc	86/63/s
Miami	79/71/pc	81/75/c
New York City	50/39/pc	58/47/s
Phoenix	92/65/pc	93/65/pc
San Francisco	68/54/pc	70/54/pc
Wash., DC	59/42/s	64/47/s
Weather (W): s-sunny, pc-partly cloudy, c-cloudy, sh-showers, t-thunderstorms, r-rain, sf-snow flurries, sn-snow, l-ice.		

REGIONAL FORECAST

Shown is today’s weather. Temperatures are today’s highs and tonight’s lows.

City	Today	Wed.	City	Today	Wed.
Baker City	67/33/pc	69/37/pc	North Bend	61/54/r	64/53/sh
Brookings	61/54/c	61/53/c	Roseburg	67/49/pc	75/52/pc
Ilwaco	57/55/r	59/54/r	Seaside	57/55/r	60/54/r
Newberg	58/54/r	64/55/sh	Springfield	62/52/c	69/55/sh
Newport	56/53/r	58/52/sh	Vancouver	57/54/r	64/56/sh

City	Today	Wed.	City	Today	Wed.
Astoria	58/53	65/51	Enterprise	64/47	65/39
Corvallis	60/52	66/63/s	John Day	70/43	64/35
Eugene	62/52	68/63/s	Ontario	64/35	64/35
Medford	72/45	68/31			
Portland	58/55	65/51			
Salem	61/54	65/51			
Albany	59/54	65/51			
Yakima	58/42	65/51			
Walla Walla	64/52	65/51			
Lewiston	64/47	65/39			
Pullman	62/48	65/39			
Spokane	57/46	65/39			
Wenatchee	49/42	65/39			
Moses Lake	56/44	65/39			
Kennewick	65/51	65/39			
Hermiston	65/46	65/39			
Pendleton	67/50	65/39			
La Grande	67/43	65/39			
Burns	69/27	65/39			
Caldwell	64/35	65/39			
Ontario	64/35	65/39			