

Adventures in Targeted Grazing



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Flying Mule Farm

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“To be successful with sheep, even when you’re not thinking about them, you need to think about them a little.”

Ivan Doig, *Dancing at the Rascal Fair*



Overview

- Background on Flying Mule Farm
- Our experience with targeted grazing
- Symptoms versus Disease
- Risks and Rewards
- Public Relations
- A Question of Scale!



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Placer County Agriculture

Flying Mule Farm

- Current Products
 - Grass-fed lamb and mutton
 - Blueface Leicester yarn, roving and batting
 - Live lambs
 - Raw wool
- Current services
 - Vegetation management – in partnership with Prescriptive Livestock Services and Emilio Huarte
 - Shepherding Skills Workshops
 - Stockmanship Training

2 Key Questions!

If you're a land owner or manager,
what are you paying for?



If you're a rancher, why should you
get paid?



Symptoms vs. Disease

Symptoms

- Invasive weeds
- Erosion
- Bare ground
- Fuel-loading

Disease

- Lack of active management

Targeted Grazing addresses the “disease” of no management!

What is your primary business?

Is grazing a byproduct of your livestock/meat business, or is livestock/meat a byproduct of your vegetation management business?



Understanding Vegetation and the Environment

- Growth stages and types
 - Grazing vs. trampling carbon
 - Browsing vs. grazing
- Using all 3 impacts and rest
- Picking the right species for the job
- Toxicity
- Nature vs. nurture
 - Teaching animals to graze/browse



behave.net – Utah State Cooperative Extension

- Mother knows best
- Early experiences matter most
- Animals must learn how to forage
- Animals avoid unfamiliar foods
- Variety is the spice of life
- Everybody is an individual
- Palatability depends on feedback from nutrients and toxins
 - Nutrients increase palatability; toxins decrease it
 - Changes in preferences are automatic (animals don't have to think about it)
 - Toxins set a limit on intake

The collage consists of four images arranged in a 2x2 grid:

- Top Left:** A large flock of sheep grazing under the shade of a large tree in a grassy field.
- Top Right:** A close-up of two sheep lying down behind a wire fence, with dense green vegetation in the background.
- Bottom Left:** A sheep standing in a field of tall, green, spiny plants, possibly thistles or toxic weeds.
- Bottom Right:** A white rectangular panel containing the text "Grazing behavior and preferences can be taught." with a small circular icon at the bottom left corner.

Using herd effect to manage annual grasslands.

Animals can handle small amounts of toxic plants if there is other forage available.

Grazing behavior and preferences can be taught.

The image shows a "Before..." scene on the left and an "After!" scene on the right, separated by a vertical line.

Before... A person stands in a lush, green, overgrown field with dense brush and trees in the background.

After! The same area is shown after grazing, appearing much more open, with reduced brush, fallen logs, and a person standing in the cleared area.

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Who are you working for?



- Agencies
- Nonprofits
- Homeowners Associations
 - Manager
 - Board
 - Members
- Private landowners



Investments

- Infrastructure
 - Fencing
 - Water
 - Transportation
 - Dogs (herding and LGD)
- Skills
 - Stockmanship
 - Range and vegetation management
- Personnel
 - Herders

Risks



- Vandalism and theft
- Toxicity
- Predators
- Nutritional stress
- Transporting weeds
- Residual negative perceptions regarding grazing
- Emergencies

Understanding the Setting

- Neighboring landowners
- Urban vs. suburban vs. rural
- Predators



Public Relations

- Workshops and outreach
- One-on-one
- Social media
- Get to know the authorities!
 - Fire
 - Animal Control
 - Law enforcement



Questions of Scale!



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- Why more is better:
 - Efficiency of labor and infrastructure
 - Herd effect is critical component
 - Duration of contract and impacts to neighbors

Costs (or Expenses)

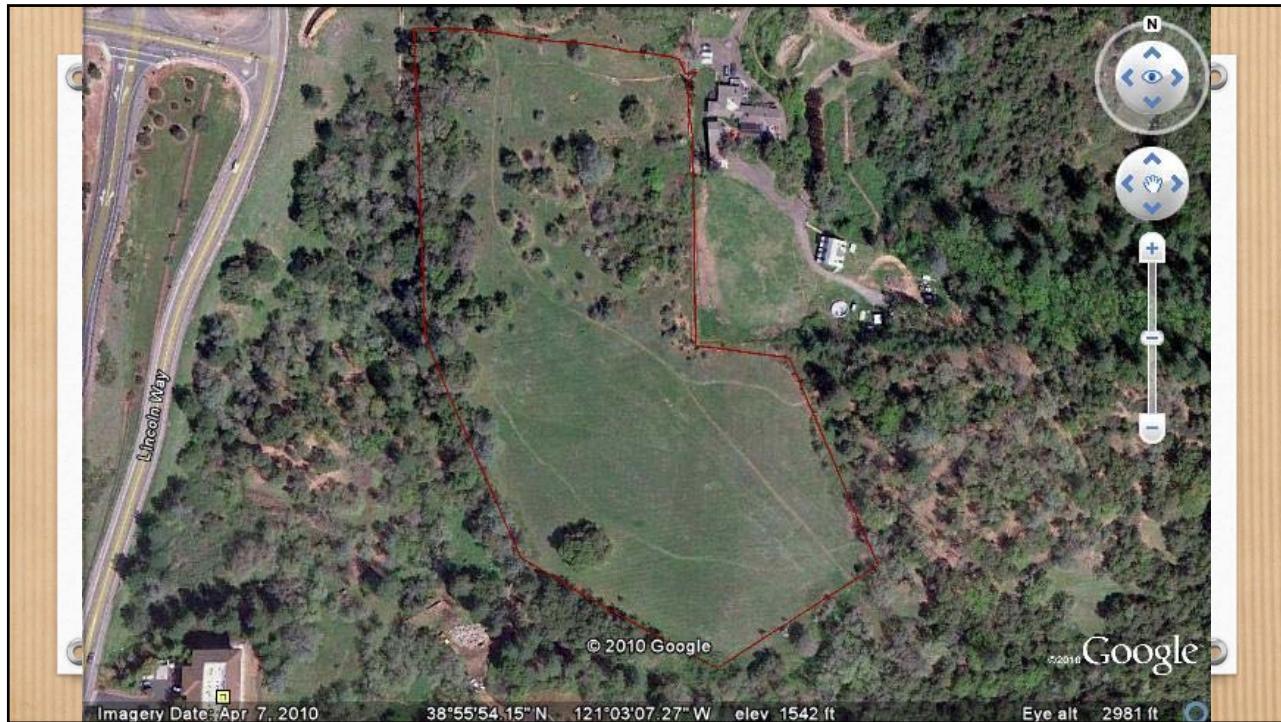
- Transportation in/out
- Grazing costs (per acre or per head per day)
- Added expenses
 - Hauling water
 - Difficult fencing
 - Herders
- Headache factor
- Must have somewhere else to go when project is completed!



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Working Together

- Project design can support vegetation management activities
 - Water access
 - Loading and unloading access
 - Stock “drive-ways”
- Working with law enforcement other officials
 - Mapping of project locations and contractors
 - Goats versus sheep!
 - Emergencies

Key Answers

For Agencies, you're paying for:

- Treating large landscapes
- Treating the disease rather than the symptoms
- Treating land that is too “something” to mow or spray
- Positive public relations!

For Producers, you're being paid for:

- Your stockmanship expertise
- Your knowledge of vegetation and land management
- Your time
- Your risk

Where will targeted grazing be in 5 years?

- Demand for large-scale projects will be driven by development.
- Increased demand for homeowner-scale projects – but can these be done profitably?
- Public agencies will budget for targeted grazing instead of chemical treatments.
- Competition for grazing leases may put downward pressure on targeted grazing fees.
- Other livestock species will be used for targeted grazing.
- Cost of fuel and labor will impact small and mid-sized contractors.
- Support infrastructure will be critical:
 - Transportation
 - Processing
 - Shearing