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## Multi-Species Grazing

Mob, flerd, multi-specie are all terms used to describe the concept of grazing two or more species of animals in the same pasture/paddock at the same time. This is a practice that comes with some management, but also benefits. The economics of multi-specie grazing is a topic of discussion for the NE KS Sheep and Goat school being held, March 13 at the Northeast Kansas Heritage Complex south of Holton. I'd invite everyone interested to join us that evening, but here's an information primer from the University of Kentucky Master Grazer Program.

Grazing two or more animal species in a pasture-based system can increase forage utilization and efficiency. This method can also be used to renovate pastures by controlling certain forages, weeds, and brush that one livestock species may not graze. Each species of livestock is unique in the manner in which they graze and in what they prefer to graze. Knowing how different species graze, what they prefer, and possible obstacles is essential before deciding what will be effective on a particular farm.

Cattle, sheep, and goats are commonly used for multi-species grazing. The manner that these animals graze can differ significantly. Cattle are grazers that rely on forages that can be grabbed by the tongue to be pulled into the mouth and bitten off. Goats mainly graze at head height and above by standing on their back feet and are known as browsers. Sheep typically graze with their heads down but occasionally will graze at head height and above. Because of their split upper lip and smaller head, sheep typically graze closer to the ground than cattle and prefer to graze the smaller, more tender forages. Topography of a farm can create another possible advantage for adding sheep and/or goats to an operation because they are more adapted to grazing on steep terrain or rocky areas, while cattle prefer moderate slopes and flatter pastures. Sheep, goats, and cattle are capable of producing different marketable products, allowing one to diversify their income.

Grazing multiple species not only allows for increased stocking density and improved forage utilization, but can also decrease undesirable plant populations. Cattle usually graze the common grasses and legumes and leave less desirable forages such as weeds and forbs. Goats, on the other hand, prefer to browse woody brush, shrubs, forbs, and many problem weeds. Goats are also good for control of blackberries, multiflora rose, honeysuckle, and more. Sheep often choose to graze forbs over grasses and can be also used to control many weeds. Cattle will graze the taller grass that sheep may reject.

There are some potential obstacles to consider when adding another species to a grazing system. Different species may require different parasite control, fencing, mineral supplements, and management practices. Small ruminants are more susceptible to internal parasites, which will increase labor demand for management. Fencing modifications will likely have to be made if small ruminants are added to a cattle operation. While adult cattle can usually be contained using a one-wire temporary electric fence, sheep and goats will not be contained by one wire. It is suggested that woven wire or netted electric fencing be used to contain small ruminants

Predators are a greater problem when grazing small ruminants. Electric fencing is a useful tool to keep predators out. Having cattle in with smaller livestock may decrease the possibility of losing small livestock to predators. Having a guard dog, donkey, mule, or llama in the pasture can be effective at keeping predators out.

Supplying necessary minerals is another obstacle to consider. Sheep cannot tolerate the levels of copper that are required by cattle. There is a possibility of losing sheep if they are grazed with cattle and cattle mineral supplements are accessible by sheep. Using the leader-follower technique and moving minerals with each species can eliminate this problem. Knowing and providing the required minerals for each species is important.

Multi-species grazing can improve pasture utilization, increase pasture quality, increase the carrying capacity of the land, control weeds and brush, and may increase overall production and income of a farm. It is important to consider the benefits and possible obstacles of using this system.