

SPRAYING PAYS FOR ITSELF WITH INCREASED GAINS ACROSS THE SCALE

In the Flint Hills of Kansas, 4th generation rancher Mike Wiggins has been a steward of the land since long before sustainability was popular. “I have a different frame of mind about grass than a lot of people. I get a kick out of seeing clean, nice grass. Pasture is too hard to come by. If you don’t take care of it, you are wasting your time.”

To maximize grazing potential, Mike and his cattle partner put a plan to test. They split the land, sprayed half the acreage with Gunslinger® AMP, and turned out a set of yearlings. Even though the treated area carried an additional 49 head on comparable acreage, the calves still outperformed those on untreated pasture by 20 pounds per head.



“A lot of factors go into making this work, but a little bit of chemical and a good aerial applicator change things. This new plan is pretty well a no-brainer. Our calves on treated pasture exceeded the amount of gain needed to pay for spraying.”

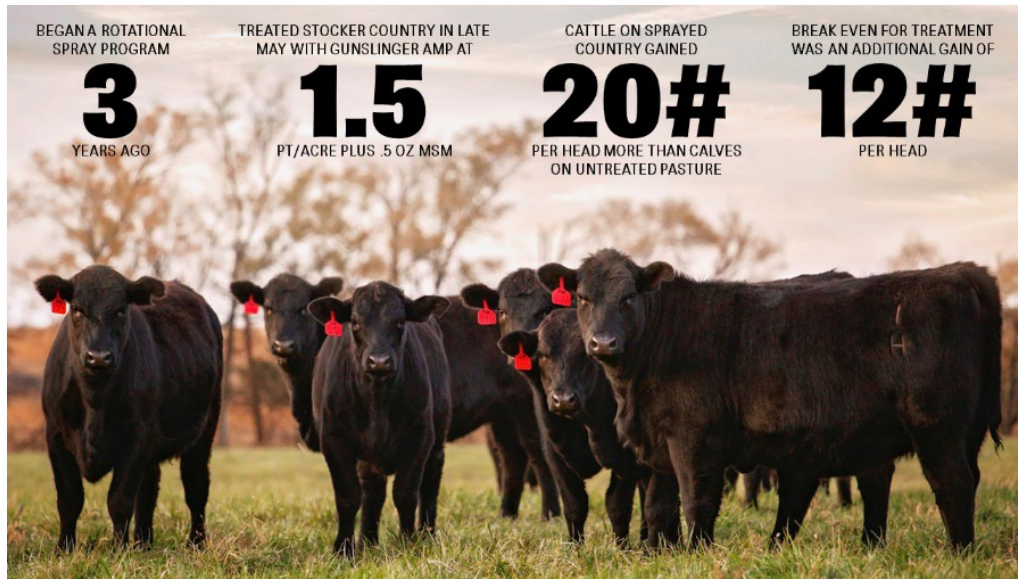
THE CHALLENGE

Sericea lespedeza (Lespedeza cuneata) is an aggressive, hard-to-control weed that crowds out quality vegetation. This warm-season, invasive species depletes critical forage sources of nutrition and invades ranchers’ grazing spaces. In several Kansas counties, sericea is already designated as a noxious, or harmful, weed. Originally introduced as an alternative food source, this perennial legume has become a hostile gladiator of the weed world.



While some ranchers and landowners try to quickly eradicate sericea, learning to manage and slowly control its growth has proven to be a more successful approach. “The Flint Hills is the best country for grazing cattle, but you have to be careful not to get too behind on the sericea.” Dropping thousands of viable seeds with extensive lifespans, sericea is difficult to control, especially in drought conditions, and has a deep root system that outworks surrounding native plants. This starves superior vegetation of nutrition and hydration. It also contains bitter-tasting tannin which makes it unpalatable for livestock. “It’s a

lengthy process, but a good management system, that includes aerial application, will show results. Most landowners and ranchers can’t skip an entire growing season, which is recommended if you conduct a fall burn.”



THE SOLUTION

With trying to figure out a way to maximize gain on yearlings and the fight against sericea on his mind, Mike reached out to Alligare Range and Pasture Specialist, Tad Bell. Previously, Mike had learned a great deal about sericea from Tad. “It’s been a win, win for me to figure out who Tad Bell is. He is incredibly knowledgeable

and I have all the confidence in the world in calling Tad for answers to my questions. I have shared the information from Tad with neighbors and even got hooked up with aerial spraying. This keeps costs down and helps control the sericea.”

A plan to burn in April, turn out calves in May, and spray Alligare’s Gunslinger AMP in June was put into action. The focus has to be on growing grass, not killing weeds. If appropriate vegetation management practices are utilized, ranchers will see an increase in quality forage and a decrease in invasive weed species. In return, this will enable more cattle to be run per acre and an increase in pounds of beef across the scale. “We must take care of the grass as it is the most affordable and nutritious food source for cattle. It’s satisfying. I get a kick out of seeing clean, nice grass and a warm, fuzzy feeling when I drive up and see no weeds. We will get grass coming our way because we take care of it.”

“Many issues impact raising cattle and making ranching work, including animal health, a good mineral program, fly control, rainfall, and quality grass. As for the latter, timeliness is everything. Spraying too late is just wasting your money. A lot of our changes go back to Tad. Have knowledgeable people on your side, buy a little bit of chemical, hire a good plane applicator, and you will make changes to your country.”

THE LEGACY

Wiggins Ranch is a diversified feeder, stocker, and cow-calf operation in Eureka, Kansas. With a legacy that dates back to 1871 when William H. Wiggins purchased and farmed the land that eventually became the city of Eureka, the Wiggins family takes cattle handling, horsemanship, and the preservation of native grasslands for future generations very seriously.

In addition to carrying on deeply rooted family traditions, the Wiggins family also works to pioneer innovative techniques to stay abreast of changes in the industry. From selling ranch-raised bulk beef to offering spring and fall-born replacement heifers, Wiggins Ranch is passionate about agriculture.

