



## Forages and stewardship create profitable partnership.

If it's possible to live on an island and not be surrounded by water, Greg and Lola Wood are doing it. Isolated by corn and soybean fields, their forage-dominated BitterSweet Acres nestles among some of the most productive cropland in Iowa, if not the country.

"We just love forage," Greg Wood says. After managing several ranching operations across the country, the Woods decided to return to Iowa and take over the family operation near Greenville in 1996. Their son, Chris, represents the third generation in this family business.

"There wasn't a lot of opportunity to buy or rent the amount of farmland we would have needed to sustain a row-crop enterprise," Wood recalls. "Chris was as committed to a forage-based operation as we were, so we



*Greg and Lola Wood (left to right), Beth Johnson and Chris Wood have increased carrying capacity through several pasture improvement practices.*

made the decision to go that route."

In addition to a registered Angus herd, the Woods found opportunity in high-quality hay for the horse market. They package their green, soft, leafy mix of alfalfa and orchardgrass primarily in small square bales and store it inside to meet customer demands.

Because forages and caring for the land go hand in glove, the Woods work hard to help increase

their farm's environmental value to the state's natural resources each year. They have protected sensitive stream banks with fencing, limited access points and alternative water sources powered by a solar pump. They also converted a lowland area to a wetland to provide a duck habitat. Their efforts earned them the 2013 Region III Environmental

Stewardship Award from the National Cattlemen's Beef Association.

### **Leave some grass; get all the thistles**

The Woods' cow herd grazes permanent pastures across the flat to slightly rolling hills of northwest Iowa. Adhering strictly to a take-half, leave-half grazing program helps keep the bluegrass/brome/blue stem mix productive — to the tune of a

25 percent carrying capacity increase since 2001 and a 15 percent increase in weaning weights since 1999. When the Woods first came home, the scheme wasn't so simple.

"We had a thistle problem," Wood recalls. Biennial thistles, such as musk thistle and bull thistle, limited grass production.

That could have been the death knell for a forage-based operation in a county where pasture acreage has dropped by 60 percent over the last 15 years. But after managing leafy spurge on ranches in Montana and Idaho, Wood knew how broadleaf weeds could hurt forage production and the land resource.

"We had dealt with leafy spurge, so we knew all about Tordon 22K and Grazon P+D and the importance of weed control," he explains. "But when we first came back to Iowa, we relied on 2,4-D plus Banvel in the fall to control our thistles — every year."

After about 10 years of those annual applications, Milestone® herbicide burst onto the scene and the Woods finally had a better option.

"With Milestone, we actually started making progress against the thistles," Wood says. "But we switched to ForeFront because some of our pastures had been neglected and we

had quite a bit of ragweed, along with some other weeds, in addition to the thistles."

Now, it's an annual maintenance program with ForeFront® HL herbicide for the Woods, rather than an annual treatment program.

"ForeFront HL is phenomenal," Wood says. "We're down to a handful of thistles that we scout and spot-spray."

#### Fuss-free weed control

Regular scouting is especially important in one of the Woods' more recently acquired pastures, where perennial Canada thistle poses a whole different challenge.

"The pasture is along a highway. Canada thistle constantly moves in from the ditches — and probably always will," Wood says. It's here his leafy spurge experience paid off. He knows the realities of a massive seedbank and the importance of rootkill.

"Again, ForeFront HL has been phenomenal," he says. "To actually



control Canada thistle was almost unheard of before, but that's what we've done with ForeFront."

And what that's done for the Woods' operation is to help them grow more grass and worry less.

"By getting rid of thistles, we've increased grass production by 20 to 25 percent," Wood says. The extra grass means greater flexibility. When the initial spring grass flush comes on faster than the cows can graze it, the Woods can harvest a cutting and store it for their bulls or they may even be able to sell some locally.

"The stress level is a little better for us, too," he adds, "because we don't have to be out all the time fighting and fussing over weeds." ■

## Eliminate thistle sting this spring.

If you have pasture or rangeland, there's a good chance you have thistles. There's an even better chance you — and your cattle — would benefit by getting rid of them. Here's some information to help you do just that:

### Biennial thistles

- Musk, bull, plumeless, Scotch, tall, Flodman's and others
- First appear as a rosette during the fall or early spring
- Easiest to control from rosette to early bolt stage
- Require lower herbicide rates than Canada thistle
- Apply 2.5 ounces of Chaparral™ herbicide or 1.5 pints of ForeFront® HL herbicide per acre

### Perennial thistles

- Canada and wavyleaf are most common
- New plants sprout from seeds and from roots
- Rootkill is critical to success
- Application timing is later — treat in the spring after all plants have fully emerged (some may even be budding)
- Apply 3.3 ounces of Chaparral or 2.1 pints of ForeFront HL per acre



Canada thistle

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