Cattle in the Environment Script

So how much do you know about beef farming? Here’s your first test. What do small family beef farmers, feedyard operators, and veterinarians have in common?

They are committed to raising beef cattle in humane and environmentally responsible ways.

*Stewardship* is the careful and responsible management of our environment and natural resources. So part of being responsible in business is becoming environmental stewards. That’s why beef producers need to be stewards of the animals, stewards of the land, stewards of the plants, and stewards of the water.

Because raising beef is often a family business, the people in the industry are often dedicated to leaving the environment in good shape for future generations while raising quality beef for their own families and consumers like you.

But even the cows do their part to enhance the environment.

Here’s how. Most cattle graze on land that can’t be used for anything else. Maybe it’s terrain that’s too steep for building anything – or too rocky or dry for growing crops.

Plus, over one quarter of our nation is covered by grassland pasture – or range land. These grasses contain cellulose which humans can’t digest. But the incredible cow has a ruminant digestive system that allows it to get nutrients from those grasses. Cows also recycle other food byproducts that are inedible to humans by turning it all into food and dairy products that we can eat.

So cows recycle by taking in what’s inedible to humans. But they also recycle with what they put out. That’s right! The manure from cattle is recycled into fields where it acts as a natural fertilizer for growing plants there.

Another way that cows help the land is just by walking across it. When the cattle walk across soil, their hooves loosen it or “aerate” the soil. This makes it so more oxygen can enter the soil - which helps grasses and plants grow better. It also helps water enter the soil easier.

The cattle also naturally press the grass seed into the soil. That, combined with the natural fertilizer in the form of their manure for nutrients, helps the grass grow. It’s kinda like recycling.

While the cattle do their part, beef producers follow the cows’ lead to help with the environment too.

Why is it important for beef farmers to manage both cattle herds and their plant growth? Well, the farmers want to sustain plant growth so the cattle always have food to eat. Most producers move cattle on their land from one area to another to avoid overgrazing in a particular area. This system, called *rotational grazing*, prevents erosion because the grasses can grow back more quickly when the root reserves aren't depleted.

The farmers also plant their crops with the contours of the hills so that it slows down water runoff and helps keep the soil more nutrient-rich.

Because different plants also use different nutrients from the soil, the farmers rotate their crops to keep the soil as nutrient-rich as possible. The farmers work with soil conservationists so that they get the best results from their fields.

Beef farmers also work hard to make sure that they have quality water for their herds and their crops... because water is so important to their livelihood.

They make sure not to over-fertilize their fields so that they reduce the potential runoff into streams and ponds, keeping them unpolluted. Feed yards are also designed so that animal wastes don’t contaminate the groundwater.

So how does this management of natural resources on cattle farms and ranches across the United States impact lives? First, for beef farmers, protecting the environment now means protecting the future for their families in generations to come.

As stewards of the land, America’s beef farmers also make sure they responsibly maintain the environment where they work and live. Good environmental practices not only conserve and improve natural resources for everyone, it’s also smart business for beef farmers.

Since so many cattle farms are family operations, the caring for animals and the land are handed down from one generation to the next.

So in the end, it’s just good for everyone to be environmentally cow-nscious!