



## **#FridaysOnTheFarm: Pastures Bloom Healthier Cattle, Wildflowers**

From the kitchen table to the boardroom table, USDA brings people together across the nation for: healthier food, natural resources, and people; a stronger agricultural industry; and economic growth, jobs, and innovation.

Each Friday, meet those farmers, producers, and landowners through our [#FridaysOnTheFarm](#) stories. Visit local farms, ranches, forests, and resource areas where USDA customers and partners *do right and feed everyone*.

This Friday, we're headed to Aberdeen, South Dakota, where Lance Vilhauer jokes he'll take up floristry if his cattle business doesn't work.

In mid-summer, his pastures were bursting with wildflowers that colored the green slopes with pops of pink, yellow, purple, and white.

While checking the cow-calf pairs that graze the prairie landscape, Vilhauer stopped his pickup when he spotted a newly-emerged plant and pulled out his guide to native flowers and grasses to learn its name.

He's continually surprised by the different species that show up. His pastures are a diverse mix of cool- and warm-season grasses and forbs. It's a mix that's developed after seven years managing his grazing system in a way that lets the land rest and regenerate.

### **Rest and Regeneration**

Vilhauer relied on expert advice and funding programs through USDA's [Natural Resources Conservation Service](#) to help prepare his pastures for rotational grazing.

Fencing and water are two of the biggest challenges when switching from season-long to rotational grazing. The labor it takes to move cattle from paddock to paddock every few weeks is another challenge, but Vilhauer said it's less work than some think.

He manages his herd while working full time as a banker in Aberdeen, an hour's drive from his pastures. On weekends, his wife Lyndsey, a dental hygienist, and kids Lawson, 5, and Lainey, 3, join him to check cattle and collect wildflower bouquets.

Vilhauer takes pride in his healthy pastures. "Seeing the different grasses and plants thrive – that's rewarding," Vilhauer said.

## Good for Cattle and Plants

When Vilhauer first made his plans for rotational grazing, he admits plant health wasn't his top priority. He figured he could run 20 or 30 more cattle.

"All I was seeing was dollar signs," he said. Since then, he's learned that the system is mutually beneficial for cattle and plants alike.

Vilhauer used the [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#) to help pay for fences, pipeline, and a water tank. He added 3.5 miles of fence, as well as water sources in the paddocks. For the first few years, Vilhauer split his pasture into two 80-acre paddocks. He built cross fences in 2012 and now shifts his herd among four 40-acre paddocks.

Lance Vilhauer secures a fence around a dugout water source in his pasture. USDA programs can help pay for fencing and develop water supplies for rotational grazing operations.

## On the Move

He moves his cattle out around May 20 each year and grazes until late October or the first week of November, depending on weather and how the grass is holding up. Vilhauer aims for a total 150 to 160 days on pasture.

His herd of 20 pairs grazes for two or three weeks before moving to the next paddock. It's a twice-through system where each paddock gets grazed two times a season.

When Vilhauer pulls his herd out for the winter, his pastures are in good shape. It's exciting, he said, "knowing the next piece is sitting with a full tank of gas."

That translates to better nutrition and healthier calves. With a diet of quality forage, Vilhauer said his cows milk better and his calves are healthier. He also had less issues with pneumonia, and weaning weights are the highest ever.

## Keeping It Fresh

Next summer, Vilhauer is thinking of doing a more intense graze, bringing his entire herd to graze one pasture for a short period of time, which can strengthen the plant community.

"Keep throwing a curve ball at your grass," said Val DeVine, a District Conservationist with the Natural Resources Conservation Service. "It just loses its punch if you don't switch it up." A handful of wild roses growing by the gate greet him each time he visits to check cattle. "I never thought I'd be such a flower guy," he said.



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