

03-04-99

Hi Gus

THERE IS A RECENT ARTICLE WHICH APPEARED IN THE MONTANA STANDARD ON THE MATADOR R/R. IT'S REALLY A GOOD ARTICLE AND COVERS THE SUBJECT OF RESTORATION GRAZING WELL. IT'S ESPECIALLY GOOD WHEN IT'S SPOKEN BY THE WORDS OF THE RANCHER UNDER R/R.

WE ALL HOPE YOUR HEALTH IS GOOD. I WORRY SOME WHEN I DON'T HEAR FROM YOU.

I'VE MENTIONED BEFORE THAT I WOULD REALLY APPRECIATE COPIES OF YOUR EARLY SLIDES ON THE MATADOR SINCE THESE ARTICLES COME UP OFTEN AND WE DON'T HAVE ANY EARLY PHOTOGRAPHS.

YOU WOULD OF COURSE RECEIVE FULL PHOTO CREDIT, BUT IF YOU DON'T FEEL COMFORTABLE ABOUT SENDING ANY THAT'S O.K. TO GUS.

WE ALL HOPE YOU CAN MAKE IT TO MONTANA THIS YEAR.

TAKE CARE Gus

Jack Jones

# Dillon-area ranch garners national environmental award



PERRY BACKUS / THE MONTANA STANDARD

**ON THE MATADOR RANCH** near Dillon recently, Ray, Kristy and Sue Marxer, from left, check Matador Cattle Co. cattle. The cattle are grazing on windrows of hay left unbaled, one of the innovations that the Marxers have implemented to add to the bottom line at the ranch.

By PERRY BACKUS  
of *The Montana Standard*

**DILLON** — With his scuffed black hat pulled down low and his worn chaps flapping slightly in the wind, Ray Marxer doesn't quite fit the stereotype of an environmentalist.

But in the nine years that Marxer has run the sprawling Matador Cattle Co. ranch near Dillon, it would be hard to argue about the results his resource-minded management has brought to the 250,000 acres that Matador cattle graze.

As grazing land became more productive, Marxer saw the overall carrying capacity of the ranch increase by eight percent and calf-weaning weights jump by more than 110 pounds.

"We've known for a long time that the resource has to be healthy for our business to stay healthy," Marxer said. "It doesn't take long for your business to be hurting if it goes the other way."

That effort by Marxer and his wife, Sue, has attracted national attention.

In February the National Cattlemen's Beef Association present-

ed the Matador Cattle Co. with its Environmental Stewardship Award in Charlotte, N.C. The national award recognizes cattle ranchers who use innovative practices to protect and enhance natural resources, while increasing the profitability of their businesses.

For the Marxers, the award helps validate the risks that came with innovation.

"It's been a struggle at times ... sometimes the change even went against common sense," recalled Marxer. "But sometimes you just have to go out there on the edge and try some different things."

That willingness to take chances and constantly look for the new ideas that are good for business and the environment come naturally for this cattleman, who's worked for Matador since 1974.

Marxer points to his former boss, Marion Cross, as inspiration.

A little over 23 years ago, Cross agreed to start a rest-rotation grazing program in Sage Creek — an area south of Dillon that includes private,

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## Award ...

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federal and state grazing land. Back then the idea was experimental. Sage Creek was one of three test areas selected in the nation. And to make the matter even riskier, anyone with an interest in planning the grazing program was invited to get involved.

"They call that coordinated resource management planning now, and they say it's something new," said Marxer, with a smile. "We were doing (it) that way before it had a name."

"The key message is that every natural system needs periodic rest and periodic harvest to remain healthy," said Marxer. "It doesn't matter whether its grass or trees ... God harvested even before man was around through wildlife grazing or burning it periodically."

Sage Creek has become the place to see the results of good grazing management.

"Until people see it for themselves ... stand there and hold the photographs in their hands and compare to what's there now, it's hard for people to understand," he said. "A picture is worth a thousand words."

"Rest-rotation grazing has been very successful for us," he said. "It's good for the environment and wildlife and it's good for the rancher's business."

National Cattlemen's Beef Association President Clark Willingham of Dallas said the Matador is "an extraordinary example where some of our most valuable resources — earth, water, wildlife, grasses and trees — are thriving hand-in-hand with a healthy cattle operation."

Dave Robertson, president of Koch Beef Co., owner of the Matador, said the achievement was important to the company.

"One of our goals is to be the operator of choice in the communities where we do business, and this award is an indicator that we are achieving our goals of environmental excellence and community involvement," said Robertson. "It's consistent with Koch Industries' very focused environmental program across our entire organization."

The Matador ranch maintains a herd of 6,400 to 6,900 cow/calf pairs and 800 stocker cattle. Of the 250,000 acres used by the ranch, about one-third is deeded, one-third is federal leased land and the remaining third is Montana School Trust land.

Besides rest-rotation grazing, the ranch has also worked on fish habitat improvements, helping with scientific research on grazing effects, restricted intensive grazing in riparian areas, increased plant diversity and range health, implemented energy-efficient water system and developed a feedlot runoff containment plan to protect water quality.

With only two percent of the U.S. population still employed in agriculture, Sue Marxer said it's more important than ever to gain the support of the American public.

"We need to let people know what we're doing," she said. "And show them we can do it well."