

Creating the best “Home on the Range”

Mr. and Mrs. Burch are cattle farmers in Western Maryland. They are the 3rd generation of Burch's to own this land. The farm consists of 150 acres of land divided evenly among hay, pasture and woodland.

Forty (40) acres of the pasture land is steep hillsides with limited production capability since it cannot receive lime and fertilizer regularly. Plant species present on these areas are primarily Kentucky bluegrass and common white clover. The remaining 10 acres of the pasture land is bottom land with a meandering stream. It does periodically receive lime and fertilizer but none has been applied within the last two years, and was reseeded four years ago resulting in a combination of tall fescue, Kentucky bluegrass and red and white clover.

Half of the hay fields are composed of alfalfa and orchard grass and the other half timothy with small amounts of red and white clover.

Their cattle herd includes 1 bull, 40 cow/calf pairs, 10 replacement heifers, and 6 steers being finished to supply meat for the family and for sale to relatives and neighbors. Their farm borders a state forest resulting in 30 – 40 deer commonly grazing on their hay and pasture land.

The past winter was very harsh with lots of snow. Because of that, the Burch's had to feed their cattle more hay than normally expected. They would normally carry over about a month's supply of hay from one year to the next; however, this past winter it was necessary to feed all of their hay supply so they have none left in storage. This spring was especially cold and dry, limiting spring pasture growth with first cutting hay yields reduced by 35 %. The forecast is for a very hot and dry June and July. August is forecasted to be wet followed by an active fall hurricane season.

The Burch's are concerned that they will not have enough feed to sustain their cattle operation. They have come to you, the local University of Maryland Extension educator, to ask for assistance in developing a plan to ensure the successful operation of their family farm. Your team, acting as the local Extension educator, will help them develop a plan that will allow them to continue farming the family farm in a sustainable way. Your plan must include how you will address the anticipated livestock feed shortage, the impact of the harsh winter and spring/early summer dry conditions on the wildlife feed supply and habitat, and what impact your plan might have on other resources such as soil, aquatics, and forestry.