

## Jonathan Baxter Success story – LCJ Farms, Batesville, Arkansas

Jim Greenburg worked at the Arkansas Agriculture Research Station in Batesville, Arkansas and Jonathan Baxter often sat behind him in church. Mr. Greenburg introduced Jonathan to rotational grazing and even though Mr. Greenburg soon moved to Colorado, the seed was planted, so to speak. Jonathan changed the way his family's land was managed and he's never looked back.

Jonathan Baxter works 300 acres his grandfather and great uncle acquired in the hills just north of Batesville in the 1950's. After working for the county road department for the past fifteen years, he recently quit to operate his cow/calf operation and preach full-time at Pilgrim's Rest Baptist Church. His wife, Catherine, a case worker with the state child support office, and their son Lane, who is ten years old, also help out on the farm.

In 2012, Jonathan attended his first grazing school. The next spring he got set up with electric fencing, combined his three herds, and started strip grazing around his pond. The land, previously only continuously grazed, had been covered in ragweed and marehail grass. After only two years of strip grazing, his fields grew thick with fescue, clover and Bermudagrass. Jonathan still has some thistle here and there, but he's got more grass than he needs to feed his 75 mommas, their babies, and two Pharo bulls. In 20108, he fed hay for only 30 days. Without rotational grazing, Jonathan says he would have run out of hay in January.



In 2013, Jonathan acquired his first contract with USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). His contract included 50 acres of pasture planning and 1050 feet of electric fence. Because of his land's proximity to Batesville, he had city water at the house, but the utility would not provide water for livestock operations. His land is also divided by a two-land highway, complicating his rotational grazing operation. To take full advantage of strip grazing, Jonathan needed additional water sources and more fencing. In 2015, NRCS provided a well, 4100 feet of pipeline, 3 tire tanks and an additional 12,000 feet of electric fence. In 2016 he received a contract for 5 more tire tanks, 14,650 feet of electric fence and 4500 feet of additional pipeline. In 2017, he received an additional well, 4500 feet of pipeline, 5 tire tanks and 5300 feet of electric fence. NRCS programs also provided a protected pond access point.



When Jonathan first started managed grazing, he didn't have much grass and he had to move his cows a lot. With his land divided by a major highway, that wasn't easy. He used gooseneck trailers at the beginning but then upgraded to a semi and trailer. It was tough, loading them on the trailer and going back and forth across the highway so often. The cows, after having been continuously grazed, were hard to handle and not very cooperative. But after a while with rotational grazing, Jonathan says, "It's so much less work. The cows are more gentle and easier to move." Catherine adds, "If we had done this sooner we would not have had so many fights while moving cows. There's much less drama!" There's also less drama when it comes to expenses. He hasn't used any fertilizer at all and doesn't use hay equipment. Jonathan says, "\$50,000 for a tractor and \$30,000 for a baler. How does a man do that? I just don't see why anyone would want to stay with conventional grazing."

Jonathan has also seen first-hand how rotational grazing makes a difference in the soil. Adjacent to one of his rotational grazing paddocks is a field that his cousin used as a hay field. He never let the cows into the field, only grew and cut hay. The field is full of thistle but just over the fence on the rotational grazing paddock, there are significantly fewer thistles. "The thistles don't know that fence is there," says Jonathan. "It has to be the soil. The soil in that hay field is basically dead."

Jonathan admits the first couple of years of rotational grazing were hard. "You don't see results really fast," he says. "You just have to believe that what you're doing is right." Looking back on his path to managed grazing, Jonathan knows he struggled some because there were no other farms in his immediate area that practiced rotational grazing. There was no history of it in his family and if Mr. Greenburg hadn't championed the idea, Jonathan may not have had the opportunity to find the success



he now enjoys. "You really need some support," he says. Jonathan has found the support he needs through frequently attending grazing conferences and other educational events. Most recently he attended Bud Williams' school in February 2019 on marketing and stockmanship. He also attended the Arkansas Grazing Lands Conferences in March 2019 and 2020. He also keeps in contact with other grazers through "whatsapp" where he can ask questions and share stories and he watches grazing presentations online.

Jonathan feels a responsibility to share what he's learned about rotational grazing with other grazers

in his area. He worked with the Independence County Conservation District to sponsor a presentation in Batesville by Jim Elizondo, the speaker he heard in that very first workshop he attended in Texas in 2012. He has also worked with the District to hold a field day on his farm, helping other folks in the area become familiar with rotational grazing and the various practices offered by NRCS. Jonathan has also recently joined the Arkansas Grazing Lands Coalition Board of Directors, serving as Treasurer, and, in that capacity, he is excited to be able to support both new and established rotational grazers throughout the State of Arkansas. The main thing Jonathan wants folks to know is that the results do not happen overnight. Conversion to rotational grazing and participation in NRCS programs is a process. But the commitment to the process definitely brings results.