

Risk Management Of “A Land Remembered”

Florida is known as A Land Remembered, which is also the title of Patrick Smith’s book describing Florida in the late 1800’s. It talks of a time when settlers moved the original cracker cattle across the rugged Florida terrain of cabbage palms, wood thickets, and marshy swamp lands. Wild animals, rustlers, mosquitoes, and hurricanes put their cattle at great risk. These cattlemen endured trials and danger as they moved their herds across the state to often receive as little as 50 cents a head. The risk of losing a great percentage of their cattle to the harsh environment was high, but somehow the cattlemen managed to survive on the lessons learned the hard way.

The book relates experiences of the early Florida cattlemen which pertains to today’s Florida cattlemen. The Florida beef cattle industry is a big part of my life and my heritage. As a fifth generation cattle rancher, this type of life and hard work is all I have ever known. I have always had a sitting spot atop a long board, in the cowpens. As a small girl I learned to sit still on this board. Today I have the job of working the parting gates off this same board.

Our ranch is a cow/calf operation which incorporates new technologies, but at the same time we’ve retained the traditional ranching ways of my great grandparents who lived the days of A Land Remembered.

I have not always recognized the risk involved in my SAE. Until I read the Introduction to Risk Management handbook I was unaware that risk management is defined as “Recognizing and acting on opportunities as well as trying to minimize losses.” Through the handbook I have learned to recognize my own unique risk solutions, liabilities, marketing techniques, and tools of diversification needed to create a successful SAE project in Beef Production, One which not only produces profits, but minimizes my risk.

In my SAE project the first major risk I take is in the type of lands here in Fort Lonesome, Florida

that we own and lease for our cow/calf operation. The lands consist of reclaimed mine lands, native woodlands, and improved pastures. The second major risk is the type of cattle I use in my beef production project, along with the environmental conditions of Florida and need for a unique Risk Management Program.

The first risk in the type of land used for our cow/calf operation is reclaimed mine lands we lease from a phosphate mining company for a very reasonable rate of \$5.00 an acre. One may ask what is reclaimed land? This is land which has had phosphate excavated by large draglines in order to produce items such as fertilizer, toothpaste, paper plates, etc. When the phosphate is removed the land is basically turned upside down, leaving little topsoil for the proper growth of forage. Reclaiming the land restores it as close to its natural state, which is vital for success in beef production. Even though the reclaimed land is economical to lease, it requires an understanding of the financial aspect of a successful cattle production under these conditions.

To operate a successful cow/calf operation on these reclaimed lands, I am only able to run a cow/calf pair to every 8-10 acres of land, leaving me to be creative with the tools I use for a profitable operation. One of these tools in the land management practice is heavy roller chopping, which is accomplished with a 9400 JD tractor and 5 sets of choppers pulled behind it. This process loosens the topsoil and aerates the ground which can become very compact and tight, making it difficult for a sufficient forage to grow. We then use a grain drill to reseed the pastures with Bahia grass seed, a type adaptable for the environment in our area. Using a good fertilizer helps to promote the growth of the bahia grass. We are able to acquire the fertilizer at a reasonable rate from the phosphate company, which is also great tool used in my financial management.

One type of grass not native to our area is the invasive Cogan grass. This grass spreads quickly and can consume our pastures in a short amount of time. Cogan grass is a very invasive grass, so we use

the practice of control burning. For control burning we use a bulldozer that pulls a large set of disks to cut firelines and manage the area of the burn. This is an effective way to control the overgrown areas of cogon grasses and prevent out of control forest fires. This process is also good management practice for the environment and the promotion of new tender grass growth for the cattle. We work along side the Division of Forestry during the control burns as a preventative measure.

Just as the Florida cattlemen of years ago knew how to control their risk with the cracker cattle, we have also selected a hearty type of cattle to graze our land. This makes the operation on reclaimed lands a success. The breed of cattle is an essential decision in my SAE, The Brahman breed “Bos Indicus” that originated in India, is the breed of cattle most economical for this type of land. The Brahman breed is the only breed of cattle to have sweat glands and a natural insect tolerance, which helps acclimate the cattle to Florida’s humid climate. The Brahman cattle are great foragers and milk producers, helping to reduce the risk involved with the reclaimed lands use. The risk we take by leasing these reclaimed lands is minimized for risk through using unique risk resolutions and the tools needed for the environment.

Another type of land we lease through the phosphate mines is the native Florida woodlands. The risk management of these lands is achievable due to the economical price paid of \$10 to \$13 for the lease of these lands. These native Florida woodlands can also become a large risk to take in the cattle business because, just like in the book the A Land Remembered the land is very dense, filled with palmetto clusters, pine forest, and marshy areas. Because of the heavily wooded areas, we also use the Brahman breed for their adaptability to the environment. They are most suitable in these dense woodlands. The Brahman breed of cattle have in the past had a reputation for being a little spirited, this has not always been an accurate statement. The Brahman breed is actually a very docile cattle breed. Negative comments about the Brahman breed can cause a risk problem for marketing.

When I am showing my four Brahman show bulls which weigh between 1,000 to 2,400 pounds, the public understands how calm this massive animal can be. You should see their expression, especially when I win showmanship with the largest of the four. Positive promotion is a great tool for marketing something that is not always understood. With the Brahman breed, I have found a unique marketing niche for the Florida cattle producers, where we cross the pure breed Brahman and pure breed Hereford to produce a F'1 (first cross) Braford which is tiger striped in color. The F'1 Braford heifer in Florida has become an extremely desirable replacement heifer to the Florida Cattlemen and also for the foreign markets. Selling these replacement heifers is an economic value to the Florida environment and the Florida cattlemen bring in top dollar. It is the Brahman influenced steer that seems to be more of a risk, with the sale price bringing less than the average market price. With the diversification of the Braford heifer being higher in value, and the Braford steer being a little less than the average market price, this creates a balance for me financially.

One of the most important tools used in the Florida cattle industry since the 1800's is the use of horses and trained cow dogs. The horses and cow dogs enable us to successfully control the cattle in the dense native woodlands. The horses are a tool that enable us to travel through areas of this harsh environment and control the cattle as we move them to the cow pens, where they will be worked. We also use the horses to ride the fences in the areas a pickup truck may not be able to reach. If we have fences down in these areas and the cattle get out and on the road, this can create a liability problem. As a risk management tool, we carry liability insurance through the Florida Farm Bureau Insurance Company.

The practice of using the cow dogs (we raise and train our own cur dogs) are also an important tool especially in the wooded areas. The cow dogs are sent in to the areas where the cattle sometimes want to hide and not cooperate. At the same time we are very conscious of the management practice of working the cattle in a stress free environment. Using the cow dogs is also a financial tool; these dogs

are such an asset to the handling of the cattle, that one dog might be equivalent to the hiring of three cowhands.

Just as in A Land Remembered, there were issues that affected cattlemen that are still a problem in the Florida pastures today. One of the risk of having a cow/calf operation in the environment of the dense Florida pastures is a coyote problem. This year alone we have lost at least four calves during calving season due to a severe coyote invasion. This can also result in major financial losses. We use the new technologies in coyote control such as a coyote caller that attracts them to an area to then be trapped. We have available to us a permit that allows us to hunt them at night when they are easier to see. As a preventative practice, we use the services available through the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission to minimize the risk of these nuisance animals.

The environment in Florida has changed somewhat since the early 1800's, but there still continues to be the problem of various flies and lice, which can cause stress and lower growth weights to the cattle. For health management practices we have implemented new preventative practices of spraying the cattle for mosquitoes, flies, lice and ticks, and incorporating the old timers practice of dipping the tails of the cattle with delice for the prevention of lice. Part of our health program also includes giving Leptospirosis, Vibriosis, Colostrial, Ivomec and Cydectin, following up with a booster in 30 days, always making sure to have less stress for the cattle is a management practice which makes a smoother application of the medicines, handling, and shipping.

Even in the book A Land Remembered, the rustic cattlemen would come across God's gift of open fertile land. Today these lands are know as improved pasture. The price of these lands can be a little more expensive at around \$15 to \$20 an acre, which is still a good value. The improved pasture lands are more fertile in grasses. We have several hay fields of star grass on these improved pasture lands, which also helps to subsidize the other lands, especially in the winter when the grasses can

become very limited causing a financial risk. In the improved pasture lands, which consist of about 1500 acres, we are able to run a great group of Brangus momma cows that we put big stout Charlois bulls on. These bulls are all selected using EPD's (Expected Progeny Differences) along with their frame size and structural correctness. These are all tools I have learned from being on a State winning livestock team. Our breeding cycle begins January 1st and ends on May 1st of every year. The calves are then sold when they weigh an average of 550 lbs. through our local livestock market, usually bringing top market price for #1 calves. This is when the use of a good financial plan and record keeping skills is crucial.

Also as a tool to help in the marketing risk we have incorporated the tagging of our cattle for the source verified program, the COOL program, and the premise registration (NAIS). By implementing these programs we are able to help minimize the risk of profit loss, and ensure safety in case of an animal disease outbreak. The markets are willing to pay on the average of 10 cents a pound more for the source verified calves.

By using the risk management strategy, I have learned to be successful in my SAE of beef production by utilizing the tools, such as the machinery used for the land improvements, marketing tools such as heifer sales, good record keeping skills, financial tools, new technologies, and the promotion of the beef industry through my education, allows me to be able to be successful with little or no profit loss.

The promotion of the beef cattle industry is an absolute passion of mine. As the 2009 President of the Florida Junior Cattlemen's Association, I am able to go travel the state and promote the beef industry to the consumers. This is also a great marketing tool. By encouraging the public that beef is a vital part of their diets, consumers will purchase more beef products. This brings more supply and demand, which in turn brings higher prices, not only for my own family but also for the American cattlemen.

Whether I am learning the cutting edge of new technology or the skills of yesterdays cattlemen as in A Land Remembered, I have learned through the Introduction to Risk Management handbook to become more profitable while also being a good steward of the land. I believe the future of our beef industry lies in the hands of the youth. and it is up to my generation to carry on the legacy of A Land Remembered.

SUPERVISED AGRICULTURE EXPERIENCE DESCRIPTION

Kaitlyn Gill

Education combined with experience leads toward success. In order for me to have the most success possible in my SAE of Beef production in placement and entrepreneurship, I have tried to be involved in every opportunity that arises to educate myself and learn more about the unique circumstances of Risk management that develop around the Florida Beef Industry. The Introduction to Risk Management is one of those opportunities.

My Supervised Agriculture Experience (SAE) in beef production shows the heritage of my family in the unique Florida cattle industry. I in partnership with my parents and brother, own the Brahman influenced cattle that we raise in our 700 head cow/calf operation. Our cattle operation is unique in the type of lands, type of cattle, the harsh environment ,and the financial risk involved.

I work for my Dad on the ranch and barter with him for the lease of the land for my cattle operation. I have 100% ownership of twelve head of registered Brahman show cattle and twenty head of purebred Hereford cattle. I cross breed these to raise the F'1 Tiger stripe Braford heifers. It is critical with these type of cattle and the harsh environment involved for us to have an excellent risk management plan.

By intertwining the different beef related activities I have been involved through the FFA and the Florida Beef Industry, I believe I can help to educate myself to reduce the risk factor in my SAE of Beef Production.

It is my goal to learn new technologies to bring our ranch into the 21st century without compromising the handed down traditions of our families legacy. I preside as the 2008-2009 President of the Florida Junior Cattlemen's Association and as Vice President of the Hillsborough County FFA Federation. The experience and knowledge from these organizations are an important management tool for my success and future in the Beef Industry.

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