GRAZING TIME OF BEEF STEERS ON PERMANENT PASTURES

M. A. Hein

In the course of a pasture experiment at Beltsville, Md., data were collected on the time animals spend in grazing. These permanent pastures were located on the Animal Husbandry Farm and were used in a cooperative pasture management experiment with beef cattle.

PROCEDURE

The method used was to keep a record of the time the animals actually spent in grazing during a continuous 24-hour period from 6 a.m. one day to 6 a.m. the following day. Records were taken every 15 minutes during this period. These data were collected for three 24-hour periods in 1931 and in 1932. In 1931 the animals were so marked that it was possible to obtain data on the individual animals without disturbing their normal habits, but in 1932 this was not possible and the records were taken as a group for each pasture.

Four pastures were located adjacent to each other and grazed with three lots of animals. Pasture A-1 (light continuous grazing) contained 8 acres grazed at the rate of one animal to 2 acres, A-2 (heavy continuous grazing) 5 acres with one animal per acre, while A-3 North and A-3 South (heavy alternate grazing) were 2 acres each with one animal per acre. The animals were long yearlings or short 2-year-old steers in thrifty condition and during the periods of collecting the data they were making an average daily gain from 0.75 to 2.00 pounds per head. In 1931, the pastures furnished an abundance of herbage, but in 1932 a shortage of rainfall in the summer limited the grass growth after July, especially on the heavily grazed pastures.

RESULTS

The records obtained in 1931 (Tables 1, 2, and 3) indicate that, in general, animals in the same pasture graze as a group, all spending about the same time in grazing. Steer No. 86 was an exception, but it was observed that he was of a more nervous temperament than the others. From the weight records obtained at 28-day intervals, the individual animals of similar temperament, grazing the shorter time, made slightly higher gains. The time spent in grazing, however, was influenced more by the comparative abundance of the pasturage than by the peculiarities of the individual animal. This is brought out when the average grazing time of lot 3 in 1931 is compared with lots 1 and 2 on the three different days. On September 20 and October 9, lot 3 spent on the average 2 hours more time per day grazing than did lots 1 or 2, while on October 2 all lots averaged about the same time. On October 2, lot 3 had just been moved to the other pasture which had not been grazed for two weeks.