

INCREASE QUALITY & DECREASE COSTS
COST EFFECTIVE FORAGE PRODUCTION
By Ron Prokop & Carmen Hagen

Our primary concern at R & R Ranch is the health and safety of our Katahdin sheep and it is our intent to raise natural, grass-fed Katahdin lamb while avoiding the use of high-cost commercial feeds and fertilizers. Thus, during the past two years, we researched alternative sustainable methods of forage production in an attempt to keep our costs down without compromising our Katahdin sheep. We were extremely pleased to find natural products that can be applied foliar directly onto pastures while allowing continued grazing of stock with no danger to the animals. We would like to begin with the economical aspects of what we found, and then discuss the products and application methods that we used.

The following figures are the most recent from our local commercial fertilizer suppliers. In July 2008, 8-16-8 cost approximately \$600 per ton and is applied at a rate of 400 lbs per acre at a cost to the rancher of \$120 per acre. The 17-17-17 costs approximately \$860 per ton and is applied at a rate of 300 lbs per acre resulting in a cost to the rancher of \$130 per acre.

What we found and works for us is a combination of three products mixed together and applied foliar directly to the pasture:

1. SEA-90™ sea mineral solids purchased in 50 lb bags costs approximately \$140 per 100 lbs delivered. Application rate is three lbs per acre resulting in a per acre cost of approximately \$4.20.
2. Monty's Liquid Carbon Soil Conditioner at \$60 for 2-1/2 gallon jug. Application rate is two quarts per acre with a cost of approximately \$20 per acre.
3. Monty's Liquid 8-16-8 at \$128 for a 2-1/2 gallon jug. Application rate is one quart per acre with a cost of approximately \$12.80 per acre.

Total cost per acre using all three products combined is an unbelievable \$37.00 per acre!

Compare the difference in costs between our method and your commercial fertilizer. The results are a savings of more than \$80 per acre. By switching from commercial fertilizer to these all natural products allows production of high-quality, nutritious, all-natural forage much more economically.

Following is the application process we used for these products. Conveniently, all three products are water soluble and applied via a traditional farm sprayer. For each acre application, we dissolved the recommended amount of product in 25 gallons of water.

Our sprayer was set at 40 psi and we used #18 size spray tips. Our 175 gallon tank covers approximately six acres running the tractor at five mph.

We used these products on our front pasture winter grazer (oats, rye grass, wheat, four varieties of legume clovers) in November 2007, and began grazing our sheep on the pastures December 15. The sheep lambbed in February and were pulled off the pastures on April 15, 2008. Once the sheep were off the pastures, we reapplied the product mix and subsequently cut hay on May 20, 2008 averaging approximately 109 square bales per acre.

SEA-90™ contains 90+ minerals and trace elements and is OMRI™ Listed for organic production of both crops and livestock. Therefore, in addition to dissolving into a foliar solution it can also be mixed into feed, added to mineral mix, or offered free choice to livestock. We decided to incorporate SEA-90™ into our farming operation both ways, but first offered it free choice before incorporating it into our mix for foliar feeding the pasture grasses. The sheep showed a very definite preference for SEA-90™ in this form and their vitality improved almost overnight once incorporated into their diet.

As many of you already realize, consumers are now more informed and product savvy than ever before. There is a serious movement by many educated consumers to eliminate commercially fed animals from their diets. These health-minded consumers are searching for natural grass fed animal product without antibiotics and chemical wormers in their feed. Using our mélange of products is a huge selling point for slaughter lambs.

In summary, this product mix works very well for us. Our costs are reduced considerably while our livestock health is greatly improved along with our hay sales. Information about these products are at the following netsites: www.seaagri.com and www.montysplantfood.com You can reach us at: R&R Ranch, Defuniak Springs, FL and at Florida.katahdinhairsheep@gmail.com

