

# Custom Grazing Survey: Stocking Rates, Fees & Services

*Co-sponsored by the Iowa Beef Center at Iowa State University, Iowa State University Extension and Practical Farmers of Iowa.  
Funded by the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture.*

The second part of the Custom Grazing Survey takes an in-depth look at stocking rates, fees and services in cow-calf and stocker operations.

## Pasture stocking rates

Stocking rates varied by soil types, soil productivity and management practices. See tables 1-2.

**Table 1. Average stocking rate for stockers during the grazing season**

Tall, cool-season grasses (Brome, orchard grass, etc.)	.7 acres/stocker
Tall fescue pasture	.85 acres/stocker
Improved legume/grass pasture	.66 acres/stocker

**Table 2. Average stocking rate for cow-calf pairs during the grazing season**

Tall, cool-season grasses (Brome, orchard grass, etc.)	2.1 acres/pair
Tall fescue pasture	2.45 acres/pair
Improved legume/grass pasture	1.66 acres/pair

## Cow-calf winter feeding components

Of the cow-calf operations with a year-round component, the winter feeding program typically ran for 120-150 days. Forty-three percent used cornstalk grazing for 30- 90 days, 47 percent used stockpiled grazing for 30-60 days, and 82 percent supplemented the wintering rations with corn grain (22 percent of those operations) or a corn co-product (60 percent of those operations). Typically, 30-35 pounds of hay was fed per-head per-day for the winter feeding period.

Most operations did not charge a separate rate for cornstalk grazing or stockpiled grazing. When they did, it ranged from 35-55 cents per-head per-day. In some cases, they charged 20-30 cents per-head per-day for grazing, plus any stored feed that was used.

Thirty percent of operations charged a wintering yardage fee, ranging from 25-40 cents per-head per-day (27 cents on average), in addition to actual feed costs. Seventy percent used a flat-fee per-head per-day rate, ranging from 77 cents to \$1.40 (\$1.05 on average). In most of these operations, the flat-fee rate was anticipated to increase due to increasing corn and forage costs in 2007.

## Grazing rates during grazing season

Custom-grazing rates varied widely among operations. See tables 3-4. Higher fees (\$1.50 to \$1.65 per-head per-day) were charged for cow-calf operations that used organic or natural grazing management.

	Range (Cost per-pair per-day)	Average (Cost per-pair per-day)
Cow calf pairs	77 cents to \$1.25	95 cents
Developing heifers	65 cents to \$1	85 cents
Pregnant cows	70 cents to \$1	80 cents

	Average (Cost per-head per-day)
Grazing only	55 cents
Grazing plus supplementation	28 cents, plus feed costs

Of the two operations that used incentive pay in this survey, both used slightly different approaches. One established a base grazing fee per-head, per-day for heifers and a separate base fee for steers. The fees were set on an average daily gain (ADG) of 1.5 pounds, but as the ADG increased, so did the fees. As for the second operation, it charged a fee based on the pounds gained during the grazing season multiplied times 40 percent of the average weekly feeder price.

This survey asked operators what inputs they included in the grazing fees. Their responses are listed below in Table 5.

Cow-calf grazing operations with a winter feeding component tended to include hay and supplement as a part of grazing season if needed. Cow-calf grazing operations also tended to provide either mineral or fly control, but not both as a part of the grazing fee.

Service included	Percentage of cow-calf operators	Percentage of stockers
Labor to calf cows (operations with winter feeding component)	100	N/A
Labor to “synch” cows	10	N/A
Bull management during breeding season	82	N/A
Chute access for implants, pour-ons	66	50
Chute access for medical treatment	76	63
Liability insurance on cattle	36	25
Dry lot access	63	62
Fly control	40	12
Mineral	42	25
Animal health	13	12
Hay	50	50
Supplements	40	50
Management of cattle	100	100
Trucking/moving cattle around farm	87	100
Trucking to market	5	0

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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Jack M. Payne, director, Cooperative Extension Service, Iowa State University of Science and Technology, Ames, Iowa.