

Linda Engle Introduction: Sustainable Idaho is brought to you by the Portneuf Resource Council.

Madison Long: Welcome to Sustainable Idaho. I'm your host Madison Long and today I talked with Dallin Munk, part-owner of Deep Creek Land and Cattle, a family-owned and operated 3rd generation regenerative ranch based in Rockland, Idaho. The ranch was originally started by his grandfather after moving from Utah to Rockland Valley. Munk and his cousin took over the farm in around 2019, and since then have been progressively trying to incorporate more regenerative farming practices.

What would you say has been the hardest challenge you've had to overcome since starting into regenerative ranching?

Dallin Munk: I would say balancing the yield and what we were getting off of that one piece of land. An example I like to use is before we were using quite a bit of commercial fertilizer on some of our irrigated ground for the alfalfa that we raised, and we didn't really have an alternative way to go. It was hard because the fields that we weren't using the commercial fertilizer on, you could definitely see a difference in production. And then we started getting into spreading manure, having a manure pile, letting it cure, and then spreading it out on the fields. Kind of using what we have or another byproduct of what we do.

ML: Agriculture discussions often rotate between different definitions of farming vs. ranching, as well as what regenerative ranching is. On the whole, farming refers to the use of land for growing crops and raising animals to produce food, fiber, and other ag products. This is your crop, dairy, poultry, or mixed farms. Ranching on the other hand is the use of land for raising and grazing livestock, typically cattle, sheep, or horses. Ranch culture is often associated with cowboy traditions and the legacy of animal husbandry for meat production. Regenerative ranching is a subset of ranching where sustainable agricultural practices are focused on with goals on improving soil health, enhancing biodiversity, and restoring ecosystems.

How does Deep Creek Ranch and Cattle define regenerative ranching?

DM: To us, that means leaving the land better than where we came into it or how we found it. We've been farming the same ground for close to 90-100 years now. We first ran sheep on it, which aren't as big of an impact as cattle, but we've been running cows now for a while.

We've seen some of the negative impacts of overgrazing or just overuse in areas, and so seeing that and recognizing it is kind of one of the biggest things to us. We're using the ground, and we don't want it to stop producing for us, and it's just better for our animals that they're happy and healthy on good, solid ground.

ML: Out of the roughly 2 million farms and ranches in the U.S., around 15% practice some regenerative agriculture practices. Can you tell us a little bit more about the operations specifically at Deep Creek Ranch and Cattle?

DM: We run about 100-150 head of black angus cow-calf to cow-calf operation. We have about 150 acres of irrigated ground that we raise alfalfa and then a three-way mix of oats, barley, and wheat and then we use that to feed our cows through the winter. So it's a pretty holistic operation, and then in the summertime for grazing, we push our cows up into the mountains just right above our ranch.

ML: Munk explained that their beef traditionally were sold to feedlots, but they are now moving to a more direct-to-consumer sale as their beef are holistic, natural beef, grass-fed and finished, with no antibiotics or growth hormones. Using a mixture of rotational grazing, Munk and his cousin are able to move their cattle around, not allowing any one particular patch to die out.

DM: Before we would just have a section and cows would just be in there all summer long and hang out wherever they wanted. You definitely noticed they had their favorite spots where they would hang out. Cows are heavy and their hooves are hard and create hummocked out spots where it's wet, clear out a bunch of undergrowth and stuff, but definitely noticed the overuse.

Since we've started rotationally moving them around to different paddocks and making sure they get grazed down, but also have time to rest and recover, we've definitely seen not only an increase in forage, but in the forage that we actually want to see, the stuff that the cows want to eat and actually an increase in drought-resistant forage as well. Which is nice because this year is another drought and we've been chasing water and cows, trying to make sure they've got enough to eat and drink everywhere. And so it's been nice to have some of this groundwork already done to where we're seeing the benefits and able to keep building on that.

ML: Are there any biodiversity initiatives that you're incorporating into your grazing practices?

DM: We partnered with a bee hive company. They come and put bee hives up and around some of our pastures and so there's pollinators flying around. They're always looking for places to put their bee boxes because they're looking for good ground with native grasses to get their pollinators on. They approached us and asked if we had places for the bee boxes, and it's always welcomed.

ML: How are you monitoring and improving soil health?

DM: We'll take soil samples and then send them in, have them tested, and see what our nutrient levels are, where we're lacking, and what we can do. And if we need to, we'll add some cover, not like a cover crop, but we'll spread some straw or hay or we'll feed cows in certain sections and then I'll add some organic matter. We just monitor the density and species that are growing there in the spring and we'll do surveys on that.

ML: Farms and ranches alike use safe antibiotics, typically to treat illness, promote animal growth, or to prevent disease. Many organic or regenerative ranches choose to do without antibiotics to prevent the development of antibiotic-resistant bacteria, which can be harmful to animal and human health. However, it is important to note that ranches that provide such

medication to their animals pay close attention to the antibiotic withdrawal time so that no residues are consumed in the animal by-product after slaughter.

How do you manage your animal health without using antibiotics?

DM: We like to think of prevention. Instead of a bunch of antibiotics, hoping that they don't get sick, we manage it with good feed. It comes back to that natural native grasses that they're eating on. It keeps them nice and healthy. The cows are moving around, trailing the water. It keeps them active and healthy as well. And then, we're not always against antibiotics. If a cow gets sick and it needs some doctoring to keep it alive, we're obviously going to give it what it needs.

ML: What are your goals for Deep Creek Ranch and Cattle in the next 5 to 10 years?

DM: Dude, I'd like to have 500 more head of cows. I'd like to increase our herd size. I would definitely like to grow our direct-to-consumer beef sales as well. I'm really passionate about providing a good, clean product. And not only that, I really enjoy taking care of these animals. I would argue we give our cows probably one of the most natural and happy lives a cow could possibly live, considering what they're being used for but I take pride in knowing that we have a really clean product.

ML: Is there anything else that you want to add about regenerative ranching?

DM: Do it. It's scary and it seems like a lot, it's worth it. It's just a whole circle of life thing. It's not sustainable, this big corporate ag, tons of chemical fertilizers, and inputs, and everything like that. Not only is it not sustainable for us smaller farmers and ranchers, but just environmentally it's not sustainable. I think a lot of people are starting to see that and changing to regenerative agriculture and trying to restore the land and use tools like cattle or sheep or other livestock to make it better.

My biggest thing is just, we're not perfect. We're still trying to figure out how we can get more and more regenerative and how we can just keep implementing more practices. But that is the biggest thing is taking that first step into changing because a lot of people have been doing what they've been doing for years and years, it's kind of a generational thing, and it's hard to break through or out of that. But once you do and start seeing the benefits, it gets easier to make other changes or continue on. So my biggest advice would just be to do it.

ML Outro: Thank you to Dallin Munk for sharing a little more about his operations at Deep Creek Ranch and Cattle. For more information, he suggests getting on their email list at [deepcreeklandcattle@gmail.com](mailto:deepcreeklandcattle@gmail.com) for seasonal updates. He also suggests following their instagram [deepcreekbeef](#) to learn more.

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