

Land Manager Allan Savory on Holistic Pasturing

How Cows Can Help Reverse Climate Change

by Linda Sechrist



grasslands, their soils, soil life, plants and animals had evolved symbiotically with large, grazing herbivores of many species and pack-hunting predators. As my inquiry led beyond Africa, I noticed that the same was true of similar ecosystems worldwide, including those of

the U.S. Great Plains.

Long ago, the Great Plains supported herbivores that traveled in immense herds for safety from predators. Where there are now approximately 11 large mammal species, there were once more than 50. The trampling of dung and urine, as well as grazing of such vast numbers constantly on the move, developed deep carbon-storing and rain-holding soils that also break down methane. Only in the presence of large roaming herds of herbivores periodically working the surface soil does this happen; it works much like a gardener does, breaking bare surfaces and covering them with litter and dung. Only in this way do grasslands thrive.

How did this revolutionize your thinking about land and livestock management?

Being trained at a university to believe that grazing livestock causes land degradation blinded me to the deeper understanding that humans' management of the animals, not the animals themselves, has been the problem. Historically, the healthiest soils in the world's vast grain-growing regions were those that had supported the largest

When concurrent dangers arising from overpopulation, desertification (fertile land turning to desert) and climate change were just beginning to attract technological solutions, pioneers like Allan Savory, a young wildlife biologist in Zimbabwe, Africa, were researching how healthy soil captures carbon dioxide and stores it as carbon. It's the way nature renders the most pervasive greenhouse gas more helpful than harmful and a major reason why this is not happening globally is because of desertification.

This innovative game-changer has since received Australia's 2003 Bankia International Award for "doing the most for the environment on a global scale" and the 2010 Buckminster Fuller Challenge, recognizing solutions that address humanity's most pressing problems. The Savory Institute, founded in 2009, and its Africa Center for Holistic Management, demonstrate how using livestock to improve soil and decrease dependence on water—plus increase its ability to hold moisture and carbon—grows more grass and improves profits for ranchers, landowners and investors.

What prompted your examination of soil biology?

In the 1960s, I first became alarmed at the rate of land degradation in Africa's vast grasslands, which were turning to desert. Looking for a solution, I hit upon a profound relationship—that the



Reach Your Target Market

Secure this ad spot!

Contact us for special
one-time ad rates.

natural
awakenings



Reach Your Target Market

Secure this ad spot!

Contact us for special
one-time ad rates.

natural
awakenings

populations of natural wildlife and intact pack-hunting predators.

We now have in hand a natural solution able to reverse U.S. and global desertification, which is contributing to increasing severity and frequency of floods and droughts, poverty, social breakdown, violence, pastoral genocide and mass movement into cities and across national borders. Restoring brilliant natural functions through holistic management of even half of the world's grasslands has the potential to pull all of the legacy carbon out of the atmosphere, put it back into the ground where it belongs and keep it there for thousands of years. Livestock aided by holistic, planned grazing that mimics nature can return Earth's atmosphere to preindustrial carbon levels while feeding people with cleaner meat.

I can think of almost nothing that offers more hope for our planet for generations to come. In fact, it has so many benefits—including an eventual net cost of zero or less—that even if climate change wasn't an issue, we should be doing it anyway.

How is holistic pasturing proceeding?

Ultimately, the only sustainable economy for any nation is derived from growing plants on regenerating soil. Today's conventional agriculture is producing more than 75 billion tons of dead, eroding soil every year—more than 10 tons for every human alive. The largest areas of the world's land are either grasslands or former grasslands.

Holistic, planned grazing to reverse desertification has gained support from thousands of individual ranchers, scientists, researchers, pastoralists and farmers. Currently, it is practiced on more than 30 million acres over six continents with encouraging success. The Savory Institute encourages and links locally led and managed holistic management hubs around the world, now numbering 30 in Africa, Argentina, Australia, Canada, Chile, Mexico, Sweden, Turkey, the UK and U.S., with more forming every year.

Linda Sechrist is a senior staff writer for Natural Awakenings. Connect at ItsAllAboutWe.com.

Reach Your Target Market

Secure this ad spot!
Contact us for special one-time ad rates.



natural
awakenings

Reach Your Target Market

Secure this ad spot!

Contact us for special
one-time ad rates.



natural
awakenings