

Adaptive Rotational Grazing

True Grass Farms, Tomales, CA



Meet Guido Frosini & True Grass Farms

For Guido Frosini at True Grass Farms, managing for production and the environment are one and the same. Guido owns 120 acres and manages a total of 1000 acres in Tomales, raising beef cattle and broiler chickens. Prior to starting True Grass Farms, he worked on a holistic management ranch in Hawaii and on his aunt's ranch for several years in West Marin. True Grass Farms focuses on managing livestock in concert with nature to produce high quality food and their mission statement is Food - Ecology - Culture. To learn more about the farm, visit truegrassfarms.com.

Farm at a Glance

COUNTY: Marin

FARM SIZE: 120 acres; grazing occurs across 1,000 acres

PRODUCTS: Grassland fed and finished beef, pasture-raised chickens

SOILS: Coastal Loamy Claypan



Goals for the farm

- Keep the farm striving, producing food for the community
- Increase ecological biodiversity
- Improve grazing management to increase soil health and production
 - maximize forage production
 - increase soil carbon and soil water holding capacity
 - protect soil and water quality
 - improve pasture nutritional profile
 - increase length of the grazing season

Why Adaptive Grazing?

Movement and flexibility

Adaptive rotational grazing (a form of prescribed grazing) appeals to Guido because of the relationship it creates with the animals and the benefits for soil health and fertility. Adaptive grazing involves dividing pastures into smaller sections, or paddocks, and moving animals frequently based on animal nutrition needs, forage quality, and soil health. Portable fencing is a critical component of managed grazing, allowing land managers to make decisions about where to graze and grazing duration.

Adaptive grazing requires paying attention to the landscape to make informed decisions. It allows True Grass Farms to keep cows out of areas that are newly planted or increase density where they want more grazing pressure for weed control or soil health and nutrient cycling. Transitioning to adaptive grazing took several years and an initial investment of resources, but now Guido has more options for moving



animals and can be more imaginative since the infrastructure is in place to support movement. He admits putting up fences and moving them is a lot of work, but makes sense because of the flexibility it provides.

"Ranching is always going to be a lot of work, but building soil fertility and caring for the animals is life-affirming."

Rest is essential

Guido stresses the role of active management - making decisions based on observations and collecting data. It's not about creating a rigid plan and walking away. "Just because you have permanent fences and the animals don't get out, doesn't mean you have proper management." Guido uses rest as a critical management tool. After grazing, rest allows plants to renew energy reserves and rebuild vigor, deepen root systems and feed soil biology, and maximize forage production in the long term. Depending on environmental conditions, he varies the amount of time each pasture rests after grazing. He increases herd densities and frequency of rotations in the early Spring, when quicker forage regrowth rates allow animals to return more often. Later in the season when lower water availability decreases growth rates, he slows his rotations and allows animals to stay in place for longer. It can be tough to make decisions during times of drought, and some pastures have been taken out of rotation during especially dry periods due to little to no forage growth.

Lessons Learned

Guido wants others to know there are programs that fund projects, although some funding programs are easier to navigate than others. His advice for other farmers is:

- If you are going to start a project, commit to it fully.
- Seek assistance from someone who believes in the project and has knowledge of local plant species.
- If you are curious, a carbon farm plan can help understand potentials of any given land base.

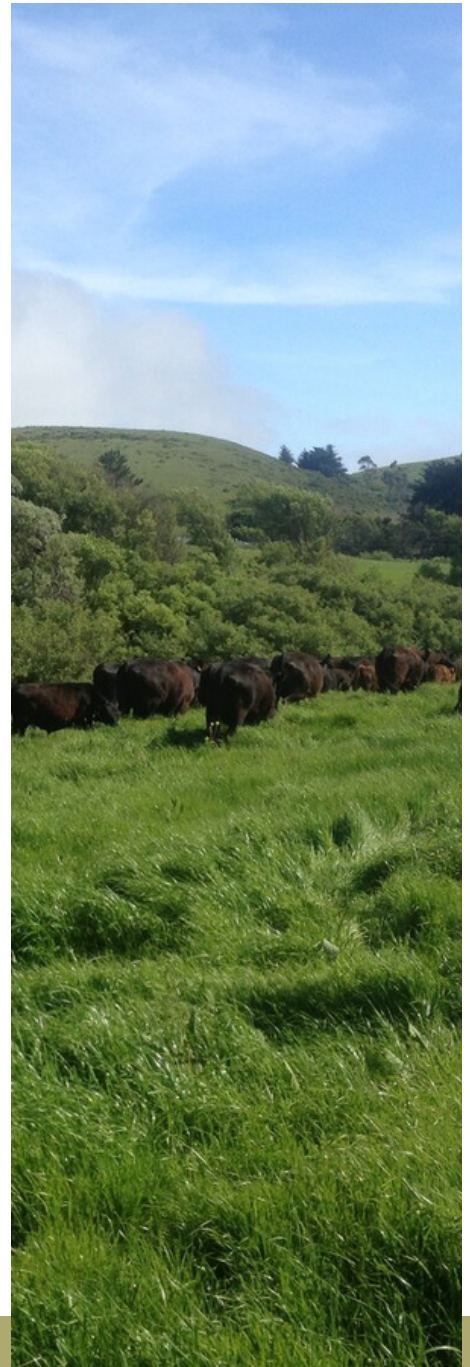
Challenges & Opportunities

The work can be frustrating, and Guido is far from feeling that everything is perfect. He looks at other ranches to see what is working and often thinks, “I can’t afford that - what do I do instead?” The need to creatively problem-solve has led Guido to adopt tools like adaptive rotational grazing to maximize forage production on his property.

This active management style has produced unexpected benefits. “When you plant a tree, it needs water. When an animal gets out, you meet your neighbor.” Through these efforts, Guido has become more engaged with the land and the community.

While many of the landscape-scale changes Guido is working on won’t be realized in his lifetime, he has noticed some indicators of increasing biodiversity, like new types of birdsong and more integrated food chains with rabbits, raptors and snakes. Last year for the first time, he saw hummingbirds on the property, including a nest in a young tree.

A takeaway from Guido's story is that it's alright to experiment even when you may not have the right answers. “Not knowing what you’re doing is okay, because it still creates a mosaic; even mistakes can create a habitat opportunity for wildlife.” Although he’s still learning how to better steward the land, Guido feels having a larger vision allows him to recognize small moments of joy because he understands the small wins are part of a bigger picture.



Getting Started

When Guido started True Grass Farms, he contacted the following local organizations and agencies to help make a plan for how to steward the land:

- [Marin Resource Conservation District](#)
- [Point Blue Conservation Science](#)
- [Carbon Cycle Institute](#)

They provided technical assistance and helped him craft a carbon farm plan, which included a plan for implementing managed grazing. He emphasizes the need to be proactive in reaching out for assistance, “The help doesn’t just show up, you have to seek it out.”