

# RANCH REVIEWS: Lee Buffalo Farms

## MAXIMIZING BUFFALO PRODUCTION

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Ranch Reviews are presented in our magazine to give you a chance to learn how other buffalo producers manage their herds. Our President, Patti Lee, has written the third article in our series of Ranch Reviews.

By Patricia F. Lee

Bison are being raised today under many management styles. They vary from the totally wild, natural selection, hands-off approach to the very intensive system that I have chosen to use. I adapt cattle management and bovine research to the nature of the bison.

At Lee Buffalo Farms, I blend two goals: **TOP BREEDING STOCK** and **100% CALF CROP**. These goals are complementary and the results have been not only 100% calf crops every year, but my heifers are calving at two years instead of the usual three years.

There are four important keys to this success:

### 1) SELECTION OF TOP BREEDING STOCK

Contrary to past literature, there truly is an inbreeding problem in many of the bison herds. Always take a look at the *whole* breeding herd before buying young breeding stock. Inbred bison will never put on the frame size or weight that you want and they will pass on poor genetics. If the breeding herd looks **UNIFORMLY** good, then you can more safely buy young stock.

Bring in new young bulls every year or two to keep your own herd from getting inbred. Keep a high bull-to-cow ratio; rutting season is short. At Lee Farms, I have chosen to do genetic testing with Stormont Labs to make sure of continued genetic diversity and to help select the types of genetics that I want to bring into the herd.

**COWS** -- I breed for large frame cows.

**BULLS** -- I keep two types of bulls. One is a large frame, trophy hunter type bull and the other is a more compact type that puts lots of weight on by the age of two. The combination of breeding gives me early large frames with more weight.

### 2) HERD HEALTH

Herd health is essential to maximizing production!

Buying young stock takes longer to get into production but gives you the best chance (as the industry exists today) to start with and maintain a healthy herd. Young animals can be vaccinated and wormed from the beginning to **PREVENT** disease and parasite damage that can't be reversed in the older animal. Proper vaccination will activate the tremendous immune system of the bison, and **NO** feeding of low-level antibiotics are ever needed!

I vaccinate for the following: Brucellosis, Leptospirosis, Anaplasmosis, Clostridial 7-Way, IBR/BVD/PI-3/BRSV and Pinkeye. I test the entire

herd for TB and Brucellosis each year. Every Bison I purchase goes into quarantine ... two sets of tests with 45 days interim, vaccination and worming. They are put on my intensive feeding program and if they are not healthy or growing rapidly they don't go into the breeding herd.

### 3) NUTRITION

Top nutrition is an equal partner in top production. My method has been to keep **KENT** Formula mixed grains with a complete vitamin/mineral supplement and molasses as well as good hay and mixed grass available at all times. High quality protein blocks are available except in the summer. Grain magnesium is fed free choice and some is mixed in the feed just prior to the spring grazing season. (Magnesium is a preventative for grass tetany.)

Pasture rotation allows me to maximize my carrying capacity per acre and the young calves start right in with all the nutrition needed to grow enough to breed at about 15 months.

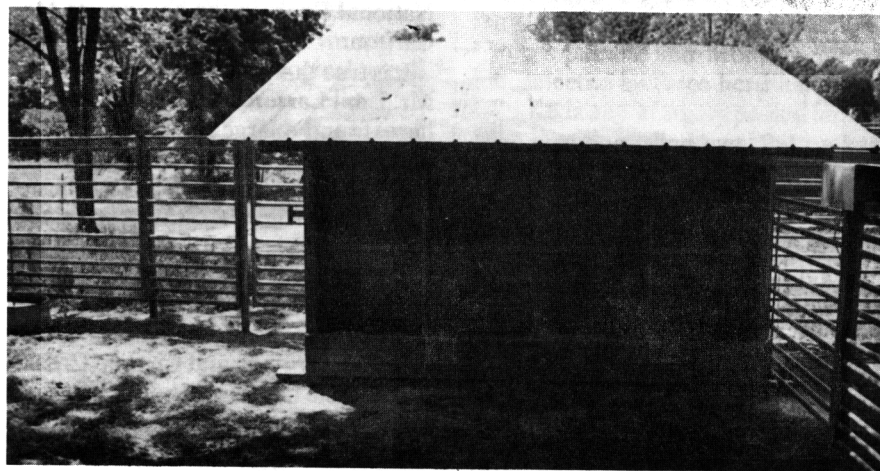
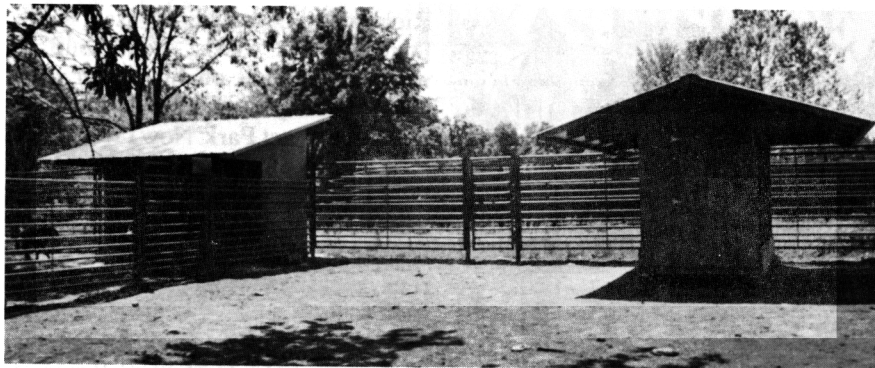
If you want a bison cow to cycle each and every year, not missing the season's rut, then you need to maintain top herd nutrition and a percentage of body fat to trigger the estrus cycle. (Cattle need at least 15% carcass fat to trigger their estrus cycle while raising a calf.)

If you want young heifers to grow enough to breed at 15 months, to carry a fetus and continue her own growth, then the next year to continue growing while pregnant as well as raising a calf, you **MUST** maintain top nutrition levels!

I keep total nutrition available at all times in many forms and let the bison instinct decide their individual needs. This works because the bison will not overeat and founder. I have four self feeders, each with over two-ton capacity, that are kept filled at all times.

Feeder location is used to move the herd and take advantage of the bison's migration instinct. My feed system is





also designed to *negate* the very strong pecking order in the bison. This key feature is the secret of keeping each and every heifer and cow in top condition to cycle every year. Dominant females and their offspring will dominate a limited feed supply. I deliberately override this pecking order with the feed system I use.

Self feeders increase the feed bill; however, the large quantities purchased allow for some savings, no labor is involved in feeding (a large savings) and the 100% calf crop plus the extra calf crop from two year olds more than pays for the additional feed. The two-year-old bulls will weigh 1200

to 1500 pounds at 24 months. These two-year-olds can be used for breeding their second summer and slaughtered that winter.

#### 4) PARASITE CONTROL

This is an absolute must in my program!

Nutrition and health will be lost if parasites are allowed to become established. Injectable Ivomec is used each November after the first hard freeze. This gets rid of 13 types of worms (both adult and immature) as well as lice, mange mites, and grubs. I feel working buffalo through the chute in the Spring is dangerous to their

calving, so I use MoorMan's IGR (fly) blocks from before fly season until after the fall freeze. I take the mineral supplement (except calcium) out of the grain mixture for this time, as mineral is fed through the IGR blocks. Several of these blocks are placed at each lounging site the buffalo use. Fly control is through pupae control in the manure. Tramisol pellets (or range cubes) are easily used for keeping many types of worms under control through the spring and summer.

#### CAUTION

Like all knowledge, the price is costly and I want everyone to realize that bison are susceptible to *Ketosis* and *Pregnancy Toxemia*. These conditions can occur by withdrawing the bison from an intensive feeding system rapidly. They must be "let down" over a period of time. Their condition should be maintained or increased just prior to and during calving season. Do not de-condition breeding stock at this time. Of course it is not wise to change any feeding ration, either up or down, rapidly. Feed rations should always be changed gradually.

*NOTE: Brand name products mentioned are used as directed for cattle.*

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