

Parker Pastures

Planned adaptive multi-species grazing and riparian management to improve soil health, increase productivity and stocking rates, improve product quality, and compete for desirable leases.

*“We’ve found that with
healthier soil we grow more
grass with less rain...
holy cow!”*

—BILL PARKER



Kelli and Bill Parker founded Parker Pastures in Gunnison, Colorado in 2006. With extensive experience and education in regenerative livestock production and Holistic Management, the Parkers have been able to create and grow a thriving business that supports their family and contributes to the health of their community. Since starting the ranch, they have used skillful planning, monitoring, and management to improve the health of the lands they lease and outperform regional production expectations. Their management has also given them a local reputation for exceptional land stewardship that has helped them win desirable leases and produce high-quality and nutritionally dense products that attract customers from throughout their state who are willing to pay a premium price for the Parkers' high-quality products.

THE RANCH

Parker Pastures operates on 4,375 leased acres in the high mountain valleys surrounding Gunnison, Colorado. Started in 2006, the ranch produces 100 percent grass-fed beef and lamb with the mission to “be excellent stewards of Creation, to promote life in all forms, to produce healthy, grass-fed meats in a way that regenerates the land, to support an excellent quality of life for our family, and to have absolute honesty and integrity in all of our relationships.”

In their work to achieve this mission, Kelli and Bill Parker had to face a challenge. Most of the lands they lease had been used for decades for conventional hay production that degraded soil health and productivity through heavy plowing, compaction, and continuous chemical fertilizer and herbicide use.

REGENERATIVE PRACTICES

The Parkers have worked hard to restore and improve the productivity and resilience of their lands and preserve the health of their community's watershed with regenerative land management and holistic planning.

One of the most important tools they use to steward the land is their multi-species herd of cattle and sheep that together help promote healthy grass growth and control weeds. With adaptive planning and management, temporary electric fencing, and low-stress handling, the Parkers carefully move and cycle livestock to where they will have the most beneficial impact in order to grow diverse and healthy plant communities that protect the soil and provide high-quality forages for the animals year-round.

Water management is also important to the Parkers. In addition to growing the health of their soils and their land's ability to productively absorb and filter water, Kelli and Bill have worked closely with the Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS), Trout Unlimited, and the City of Gunnison's Parks and Wildlife Department to care for riparian areas on their ranch. In partnership, they have been able to restore and stabilize miles of stream and river banks and update aging and inefficient water infrastructure to improve water use efficiency, increase stream/river recharge, and restore and protect fish habitat.



HIGHLIGHTS

2×
STOCKING RATE

With regenerative management and planned adaptive grazing, the Parkers have been able to double forage production and stocking capacity on the lands they manage.

15%
PRICE INCREASE

Demand for Parker Pastures meat has been consistently growing each year. In Gunnison and beyond, their reputation for producing nutrient-dense and delicious meats in a way that improves the health of the land has increased direct market prices by around 15%.

2+
FULL-TIME
INCOMES

The ranch's business comfortably provides Bill and Kelli with two full-time incomes as well as part-time opportunities for their children.

“What holds a lot of people back in this field is that they don’t get to work with, talk with, or see the experiences of successful practitioners. We work hard to be transparent and share our work with customers and other producers.”

—KELLI PARKER



SEEING THE BENEFITS

Parker Pastures has seen many positive results from their work. Closest to home, the Parkers' regenerative management and reputation for stewardship helped them secure a very desirable long-term lease from the City of Gunnison for 375 acres of pasture with a house and outbuildings that now serve as their family home and business headquarters. The property is unique as it borders critical wildlife habitat areas of the Gunnison River and has several popular public trails running through it. The ecological and public importance of the property mobilized overwhelming support from the residents of the town and helped Parker Pastures get the lease.

Across all of their lands, the Parkers' management has also been instrumental in supporting the growth of their business. The Parkers have seen bare ground decrease and forage quality, quantity, and diversity increase in their fields, which has dramatically improved stocking capacity

as well as meat quality. Further, the visible effects of their management have helped create new income streams by attracting the public and other agricultural producers to the ranch to attend paid educational workshops, farm dinners, and tours. Kelli and Bill also provide paid consulting services for ranchers interested in regenerative land management. Parker Pastures has also begun participating in the Savory Institutes' Land-to-Market program that helps ranchers get premium prices for meats raised using practices with verifiable ecological benefits.

In the coming years, the Parkers plan to continue growing their business, taking on new leases, and growing opportunities on the ranch for their children. Excitingly, their eldest daughter, Cloe, has taken ownership of their sheep enterprise and has begun to expand it and start ambitious management trials with low-stress handling and high-density grazing meant to help the ranch use the sheep in a more targeted way to care for the land. ■



The Profiles in Land and Management Series features the work of innovative ranchers and land managers who are achieving economic and ecological benefits on working lands.

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