

Midwest Messenger LIVESTOCK

ROUNDUP

Cattle producer converts all crop acres to forage production

By Lura Roti
for AgSpire

At only 27, cattle producer, Damon Becker has accomplished a lot since 2020. He expanded his cattle herd by 250 head. He converted all his crop acres to forage. He built a calving barn. He updated fencing and other infrastructure throughout his family's century-old Faulk County, South Dakota farm.

But Becker hasn't had much time to think about what he's done in the years since graduating from South Dakota State University with an animal science degree because once he committed to raising cattle and forage full-time, his focus has been on the future.

"I don't get time to reflect because it is always on to the next thing," Becker said. "When we sell our calves in January, I'm checking cameras as I walk out of the sale barn because we have heifers that are calving. I don't have time to take in the 10,000-foot-view and appreciate things as much as I'd like to."

It's a humid July day when Becker takes a few minutes to sit down and share his story. Right now, his focus is on baling forage barley so he can drill in a cover crop blend for fall grazing.

"Barley makes really good cow feed. It's a prolific hay producer. It's easy to dry and the cows love it," he said. "Once its baled, I'm going to drill in a mix of sorghum Sudan grass, some brassicas and some legumes. The plan is to bring in some diversity to help the soil."

This plan has been in place since September 2025. Becker may not have time to reflect, but he certainly makes time to plan.

"Nothing I do on this farm is 'winging it.' Every decision is based on research and calculated planning," said Becker on the management philosophy he has implemented since he took out his first Farm Service Agency loan to buy 180-head of cattle and got his family's blessing to begin raising cattle and forage full time.

"I thought if I worked off the farm, I would not be able to do the quality job that I think I can do because I'd be worrying about my 8-to-5 job and the farm would suffer," Becker said. "To use a baseball analogy, I'm going to go 100% at this and swing as hard as I can. If I fail, I know at least I really tried."

A fifth-generation farmer, Becker acknowledges he wouldn't have the career he loves today if it were not for



Photo courtesy of AgSpire

Sixth-generation Faulk County cattle producer, Damon Becker converted all his crop acres to forage. This summer the forage barley he frost seeded yielded 4.5 tons per acre. After it's baled, Becker will drill in a warm season cover crop mix that his cattle windrow graze.

the sacrifice of his grandpa, Bill Becker Sr., and dad, Bill Becker Jr.

The 1980s farm crisis forced his grandpa and dad to work full-time off the farm. Their careers saved the farm.

"There is no way I could make this whole thing work, if I had more than my cattle and equipment payments. I can make this work because I don't have a land payment, a house payment or a family," Becker said. "It doesn't take much to cover me and my dog, so I can invest everything back in the cattle and land."

Becker and his Australian Sheppard, Lucca, live in a small apartment in the farm's new calving barn. He built the calving barn in 2023 after a devastating calving-season blizzard.

Out of the box focus on forage

Growing up, haying was the chore Becker dreaded. "I'd be out in the pasture with ruts, going 5 mph trying to avoid the slough or creek and beating myself up all week to get 150 bales off 140 acres."

Today, haying is something he looks forward to. The difference? He is haying on what was farm ground. In

2024 Becker converted all the farm's crop acres to forage blends.

"Haying on converted crop ground is so efficient and fast. I can start mowing 140-acres after lunch and get done well before dark. Then, dad will come over and rake after work and be back to his house before 9," Becker explained.

It's a good thing Becker enjoys haying because it takes up much of his time June 1 through Sept. 30.

"I believe hay is a much better use of this land. And better for cash flow because I'm marketing it through cattle," said Becker of his commercial cow-calf herd. "There are years, like 2019 or 2023, when the land was drowned out and I would not be able to get a traditional crop planted."

To maximize forage quality and tonnage, Becker is intentional about the forages he plants on each acre.

"I enjoy educating myself on the different species' varieties and what they can do and then I choose varieties, whether its annuals or perennials, to do different things based on what the soil needs," Becker said. "If there is an area of the field that is prone to flooding, I will plant Japanese millet there because it is not going to drown out. And there's some good quality, racehorse grasses that will give me multiple cuttings and other grasses with deep roots to help with water infiltration."

An understanding of forage species and cover crop mixes allows Becker to extend the growing season on his acres.

"When everyone else is dusting off their planters the first or second week of April, I'm the weird guy who is out drilling in a spring cereal – almost frost seeding. I like it because I'm getting forage in the ground to best utilize the rain."

This summer the forage barley he "frost seeded" yielded 4.5 tons per acre. After it's baled, Becker will drill in a warm season cover crop mix that his cattle windrow graze.

"I cut the cover crop late fall, right before the frost to preserve the forage quality, but it also increases harvest efficiency," Becker explained. "If the cows were to go out and graze it standing, they'd waste a lot."

"I've also done some drone interseeding of legumes into existing pasture to increase the tonnage and fix some nitrogen in the soil – so giving the cows something good to eat and I'm making the soil better," he said.

As he shares his forage management strategies, Becker's passion is evident.

"I like being a little creative and try some different ideas with forages," Becker said. "I do think for many

producers, forages get put on the back burner and are kind of an afterthought. But if you are willing to do the research and do the leg work to find the best varieties and mixes, you can really increase your production and take advantage of the cattle market we're feeding these forages through."

Forage-geek collaborates with cattle-enthusiast

Becker spends hours researching and thrives on strategizing new ways to bolster his forage yields and quality.

"I'm a bit obsessive about forage research. But it's something I feel like I have to do myself because in South Dakota there is a very small pool of people who study forages, which is sad because we are one of the top states in forage production," Becker said.

About a year ago, this forage-geek connected with Mitchell VanderWal, who has worked as a producer advisor for AgSpire since 2025. AgSpire is a company that provides crop and livestock producers with technical and financial assistance to help with costs associated with regenerative agriculture and conservation practices that contribute to more resilient cropping, grazing, and herd management systems.

"I appreciate that I can bounce ideas off of him," Becker said. "Or if I'm 50/50 on the fence about something, I can ask what Mitchell thinks about the idea. It is nice to have someone who is as knowledgeable about forages as me to talk about risks and benefits with."

Like Becker, VanderWal spends a lot of time focused on maximizing forage production.

"I can honestly say I'm a cattle enthusiast, I appreciate forages because of my love for cattle," said VanderWal, who grew up on a cattle farm near Howard and still enjoys judging cattle shows on the weekends. "I have learned so



Photo courtesy of AgSpire

Faulk County cattle producer Damon Becker has been raising cattle and forage fulltime since he graduated from South Dakota State University in 2020.



Scan the QR code to watch a video featuring Damon Becker.

much from Damon. It's so fun to work with him because of his passion for livestock and forage production."

Partnering for cashflow

Becker was motivated to convert the farm's crop acres to forage the year he had to purchase hay to feed his

cattle.

"I hated it. I hated everything about it," he said. "Yes, I did my research, and I had the hay tested for quality, but it was a hassle and it was not something I ever wanted to do again."

Together with his dad, Becker invested in hay equipment. Since Becker began managing their farm's crop acres for forage production, he has not needed to purchase hay even though his cattle herd has increased in size.

And with VanderWal's help, Becker began participating in an AgSpire program which provides per acre payments to help offset input costs associated with establishing new forage production or improving existing production.

"The resources AgSpire provides allow me to make the best decisions without worrying about cash flow," Becker said.

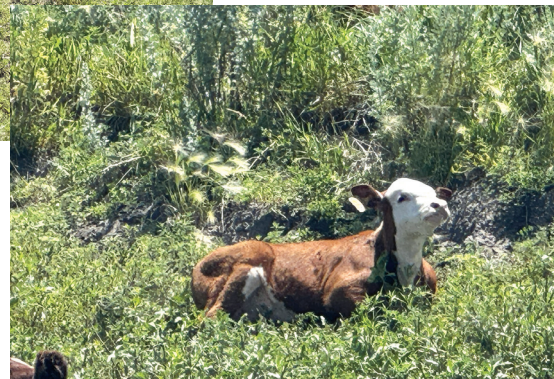


Photo courtesy of AgSpire

Since 2020, Becker has expanded his cattle herd by 250 head and converted all his crop acres to forage.

AgSpire offers payments and technical assistance on practices designed to assist livestock producers in their efforts to increase forage production on their operation through planting forage cover crop mixes or forage perennials. Each practice has a set dollar amount producers can utilize toward implementing and maintaining it.

"The incentives AgSpire provides give me more flexibility and more opportunities to make that hay crop even better without having to

crunch numbers all the time," Becker said.

To learn more about AgSpire and watch a video featuring Becker, visit www.agspire.com.

WELLMAN

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

Gratefully, there are people like me that want rural grocery stores to be realities, not memories. The Howard G. Buffett Foundation is privately funding The Rural Grocery Store Learning Cohort in order to connect, educate and financially support rural grocers. This program will run through 2029 and came about as a collaborative effort between the Center for Rural Affairs, University of Nebraska Cooperative Development Center, and UNL Rural Prosperity Nebraska. Participants that complete half of the educational sessions are eligible for a \$10,000 grant. Sign up for this year is complete, however mark your calendars for 2027.

The Nebraska Legislature is also paying attention to this issue, having discussed for a few years a bill known as the Grocer Reinvestment Option Act. Introduced by Sen. Teresa Ibach, it would provide financial help for technology upgrades, business changes and buying goods. Sadly, it has never been passed into law, but I remain prayerful it will come into discussion again when the Legislature convenes in January 2027. Rural food access, after all, is a crucial topic year after year.

What is Wauneta going to do about their grocery



Submitted photo

A sign encourages donations for the cooperative grocery store being planned in Wauneta, Neb. Hopes are to open this year.

store? Plenty. The community is coming together to make a cooperative grocery store a reality. They have worked diligently to provide community meetings, stock options and donation options to turn the dream switch and sustain the community long term. Their hope is to open yet this year, and they are well on their way to securing the necessary finances to do so. Visit waunetagrocerycooperative.com if you believe in the mission, or if you simply want to know more about how to bring such a thing to your small town.

You better believe the Wellman family has pledged and committed our financial support and prayers. We are firm in believing that everyone deserves a Walgren's Supermarket kind of experience and life impact.

A grocery store is so much more than a storefront.

The Rusty and Dixi Wellman family is deeply rooted in Nebraska, raising Wagyu cattle, Vizsla hunting dogs and chickens. They also co-run a nonprofit that puts local beef on thousands of school kids' lunch plates, and love sharing their faith and passion for small towns, agriculture, rural living, small business owners, and servant leadership.

Frosted sorghum and prussic acid

By Ben Beckman
Nebraska Extension

As fall progresses, temperatures continue to drop and chances of a freeze grow. When frost hits, do you know the impact on forages and how livestock can be kept safe?

Short-term freezing temperatures may cause sorghum species such as sorghum-sudangrass or any grain, milo, or forage sorghum to become lethal to livestock. Prussic acid, also known as hydrogen cyanide or HCN, forms when plant cell membranes are broken due to freezing, allowing compounds in the plant to mix. One of those compounds is dhurrin, which can break down and release HCN, a cyanide compound that can be deadly to livestock if consumed. Sudangrasses have the lowest risk while forage and grain sorghum have the highest. The millet species do not have prussic acid issues.

The good news is that after seven days, prussic acid risk generally drops. Every time there

is a freeze, without temperatures low enough to completely kill the plants, that seven-day clock resets, just like the 30-minute lightning delay at football games. The new growth on sorghums that have had frost damage is very dangerous as it can have the highest concentrations of prussic acid.

If there is a chance of freezing temperatures, remove livestock from the pasture and wait seven days before grazing once again. The hours immediately after a frost have the highest level of toxic compounds. If there is regrowth in the days after a freeze, wait to begin grazing until those shoots are 15-18 inches tall or seven days after the plant has been completely killed by the frost.

One newer point to keep in mind is that drying sorghum for hay is not a guaranteed fix. While some HCN can dissipate during drying, dhurrin may remain in dried sorghum hay and still release HCN during digestion. Hay made from drought-stressed, immature or frost-damaged sorghum should be tested before feeding.

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Special Spring Calf Sale ft Red Angus
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Valentine Livestock Health Protocol 2026

#4: 7-way (2), 5-way viral (spring & fall), Pasteurella, and poured or injected w/Ivermectin (fall) #3: 7-way (2), 5-way viral (spring & fall), Pasteurella, no pour on #2: 7-way (2), 5-way once #1: 7-way only

Black:

300 angus strs NI Logterman, Miller & Raven 500-675#
.....Dale & Tammera Stoner and Family#4
170 blk & angus strs NI Koch & Keys genes 550-650#
.....Clayton & Cole Gurney # 4
160 blk & angus strs NI Half Box V genes 500-650#
.....Tim Hippen & Dusti Risse #4
300 blk strs NI always likeable 450-625#Bob Carr & Sons #4
100 blk, bwr, few rwr strs (most F-1) NI 500-650#Gorsuch & Mooney
125 blk NI 500-650#Roger & Mark Foster
200 blk hfrs NI 425-500#Brock & Carol Moreland #3
50 blk & angus hfrs NI 400-500#Barnes Angus Ranch #4
170 blk NI 450-550#Dave Keester
100 blk & angus NI 500-600#Bill & Adele Albert #3
57 blk NI 475-575#Liebel & Hanson #3
90 blk & rd strs NI A.I. genes 500-600#Tim & Dee Painter

Red:

175 rd angus strs Pieper sired 1 ld @ 675# 575-675#Sharp Ranch #4
130 rd angus strs NI CRA EID tagged Pieper & Gill sired 525-625#
.....Myles & Seth Addison #4
145 rd angus strs Gill sired 1 ld @ 650# 550-650#Gabe Gropper #2
135 rd angus strs Gill genes 450-650#Chance Knudsen #2
97 rd angus strs NI 425-525#Casey Bauman #3
75 rd angus strs NI age & source Ravenscroft, Hueftle & Feddes
sired .500-650#Flying D Cattle Co #4
100 rd angus strs NI Pieper sired 500-600#Uhlir Ranch
300 rwr (F-1) (100) & rd angus (200) strs NI 475-615#
.....Shane & Austin Wobig #4
150 rwr (F-1) hfrs NI not topped (main drive 565) 475-585#
.....Shane & Austin Wobig #4
50 rd angus (27s-13h) NI 450-550#Liebel & Baker #3
50 rd angus NI 575-635#Buster & Brad Hand #4
27 rd angus strs NI Gill genes 400-625#Evergreen & Chad Tetherow #3
34 rd NI 450-500#Lemoyne Dailey

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Branding & Preconditioning

Dean Cole (150)

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& Preconditioning

Cow Creek Livestock (120)

88HD Steers, 37HD Heifers, Red/RWF/

Black, 475-500lbs, Branding &

Preconditioning

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Branding Shots

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100HD Mixed, Black, 500lbs, Branding

Shots

Dennis Camino (55)

55HD Mixed, Black, 550lbs, All Shots

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550lbs, Spring & Fall Shots, Poured

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& Preconditioning, Weaned: 30 days

Gary Koltiska (33)

33HD Mixed, Black/BWF, 500-550lbs,

Branding & Preconditioning

Hardy & Cathy Musselman (30)

30HD Mixed, Black/BWF, 550lbs, Branding

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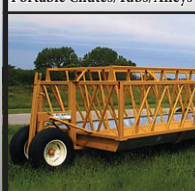
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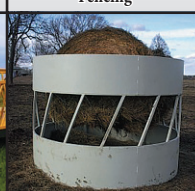
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40 blk-few bwf fall pairs-3-4 yr olds..... Kirk Bruns
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SPECIAL CALF/YRLG

FRI., OCTOBER 23RD @10:30AM

- 140 Blk/Bwf hfrs 750#, vac x3
- 68 Blk S/H 425-625#, vac & boosted, weaned 60 days, strictly green
- 60 Red Ang S/H 450-600#, vac x2, off cow, replacement quality heifers
- 30 Blk S/H 500#, vac x2, off cow
- 6 CharX Strs 1050-1100#, vac x3 & LTW
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- 1 Longhorn Bull 7 to 8 ft horns..... JET THOMPSON
FEEDERS/WEANED CALVES
65 Angus, Angus X, & few Red Angus X Steers & Heifers 775-875 #4PW..... LARRY TIERNEY
37 Angus & few Red X Steers & Heifers 875-925 #4PW..... TIM PRELLE
25 Sim Hereford & Angus X Steers 600-700 #4PW..... TRENTON & JUSTIN BURNS
20 Angus & Angus X Steers 750-850 #4PW..... COLE TIERNEY
18 Crossbred Steers & Heifers 600-700 #4PW..... AUSTIN RATHMAN
CALVES
210 Angus & few Bwf Steers & Heifers 475-650 #2P..... HIDDEN HILLS RANCH
26 Angus & Angus X Steers & Heifers 450-600 #2P..... WES & NIKKI KENNEDY
25 Angus Steers 625-650 #4P..... BOB HARDER
25 Angus & few Bwf Steers & Heifers 475-650 #2P..... DILLON & KATIE MCINTOSH
12 Red Angus & Red Angus X Steers & Heifers 400-550 #2P..... BRIAN & COURTNEY SCHAUB

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9:00 A.M. - WEIGHUPS
12:00 NOON - PAIRS & BRED COWS

Pairs

- 36 Complete Dispersion, Blk/Bwf Running Age Fall Pairs..... Dean & Leann Sidak
25 Complete Dispersion, Blk/Char Running Age Pairs, exposed back to Angus/Char bulls..... Dave Olson Estate
15 Blk Running Age Pairs..... Judge Ranch
10 Blk Solid Mouth Pairs, AI sired calves..... Matt Swanson
8 Blk 1st Calf-5th Calf Pairs..... Wes Kilmurry
7 Red/Blk 1st Calf Pairs..... Dale Paxton
2 Blk 1st Calf Pairs..... Dan & Kathy Drueke
2 Blk/Red 2nd Calf Pairs, red calves..... Clint Miller

Bred Cows

- 3 Blk 2nd/3rd Calvers, bred Angus, calve November..... Tompkins Corner Ranch

UPCOMINGS

Tuesday, October 27th - Special Calf & Yearling Auction

Wes Kilmurry, Manager | 402.340.4225
Austin Jarecke, Yard Manager | 402.340.8540

Field Reps

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CALVES

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100 Angus & Bwf Steers & Heifers-no implants 400-600 #2P..... SHANE & RACHEL HRASKY
61 Bwf, Rwf, & few Angus Steers & Heifers 500-600 #2P..... TYLER LINDSTROM
60 Angus Steers & Heifers 450-600 #2P..... DOUG & TAMMI NICHOLS
40 Angus & Bwf Steers & Heifers 450-650 #2P..... PAT SOLLERS
37 Angus Steers & Heifers 450-600 #2P..... MARY RIETZ

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Tuesday, October 27, 2026 • 12:30 PM

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Rieber.....175	T-Triangle Ranch (jet yearling).....160	Split Diamond.....100
Logan.....100	Grose.....100	Stratton.....80
Pfeifer (Red Angus).....60	Dupius.....60	Perkins.....50
Johnson.....50	Fliehm.....15	

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