

Educated Cows Eat Weeds

Turn a Foe Into Forage

In 2004, Kathy Voth invented a method for training cows to eat weeds. The idea grew from the responses from ranchers when she suggested they use goats or sheep to manage weeds. That just wasn't an economically viable or sustainable solution for them.

Kathy believes that animals are a good solution for weed management, so she decided that if cattle ranchers weren't interested in goats or sheep, she'd figure out how to turn their cattle into weed managers. Using discoveries made by researchers at Utah State University, and decades of animal behavior studies, she put together a very logical set of steps for teaching cows to eat weeds.

Using Kathy's process a cattle producer can teach cows to eat weeds in as little as 10 hours over 10 days and then sit back and relax while the cows get to work. A small group of trainees will teach their calves and herd mates to eat weeds, creating a weed eating army in the course of one grazing season.



An invention of this scope is a “game-changer” in the war on weeds. Once our cows eat weeds we can save thousands in expenses and labor and turn our focus to managing our animals so we can make more money while creating healthy landscapes.



Kathy Voth, Livestock for Landscapes, LLC

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Please feel free to use information in this packet as an introduction to the idea of training cows to eat weeds or to share as promotional materials for workshops and presentations.

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Why Train Cows to Eat Weeds?

Weed-Eating Benefits

Great Nutrition

Most weeds are the equivalent of alfalfa or better. So weed-eating cattle gain weight at or above expected rates and breed back normally.

More Forage

Once cows are weed-eaters, you aren't limited to traditional forages.

Increased Profits

Matt Rinella, Miles City, Montana Agriculture Research Service, looked at a 17-state region and calculated that if weeds were no longer an issue, producers could raise 200,000 more cattle and save tens of millions of dollars.



Cows Eat Many Different Weeds

Here are some of the weeds cows have been trained to eat, or have decided to eat once they found out weeds are tasty:

Thistles: Canada, Musk, Italian, Russian, Distaff, Bull, Sow, Milk, Scotch

Knapweeds: Diffuse, Russian, Spotted Yellow and Dalmatian toadflax

Leafy spurge, Mustards, Rabbitbrush, White top/Hoary cress, Blackberry, Cactus, Canada goldenrod, Carpetweed, Common Mullein, Coyote Bush, Curly Cup Gumweed, Cutleaf nightshade, Fetid marigold, Field bindweed, Fringed sage, Horehound, Louisiana Sage, Multiflora rose, Lambsquarters, Pigweed, Poison Oak, Poison Ivy, Purple starthistle, Ragweed, Snowberry/Buckbrush, Sunflower, Wild licorice, Wormwood, Yarrow, Yellow starthistle, Yucca



I was tickled. The cows can get to it at times and places that we just can't get to with herbicide.

Rob Alexander, Boulder County Parks and Opens Space

For more about edible weeds visit:

<http://www.livestockforlandscapes.com/edible.htm>

Meet the Inventor



Kathy Voth

In 2004, Kathy Voth invented a method for training cows to eat weeds. She started by taking a close look at the last century of animal behavior research. Then she took all the different pieces and translated them into an easy-to-understand process that adapts easily to any producer's needs.

Kathy has now trained over 1000 cows to eat many of our most problematic weeds, adapting her process for small herds of 10 cows to as many as 110 pairs, for dry lot and pasture, and for novice and experienced producers. Her book, "Cows Eat Weeds" was published in 2010 and her articles appear in BEEF magazine, Stockman Grass Farmer, and Acres USA.

Kathy is known for her entertaining and inspiring presentation style that includes lots of video, unusual "snacks" and examples from producers she's worked with.



Kathy is also known for thinking up unusual solutions to problems:

- When her community was suffering from an economic down turn she became one of two head volunteers building a mountain bike trail from Grand Junction, Colorado to Moab, Utah. The result - today the Grand Valley is a mountain biking mecca with a healthier economy. Her efforts earned her the Department of the Interior's National Conservation Service Award.
- Her seven years of research on using goats to reduce fire danger in suburban areas resulted in the only handbook describing how to manage goats to increase firefighter safety and save homes.
- For developing a novel internship program to help students transition into agency employees, Kathy was awarded the Bureau of Land Management's "Excellence in Environmental Education" award.



"You are an innovator. I am so inspired!"

"You really think outside the box, but it makes so much sense!"

Audience members, Manitoba Grazing School

Kathy's experience includes twelve years as an educator and public information officer with the Bureau of Land Management where she focused on her goal of helping communities live sustainably in their environment. She lives in Loveland, Colorado with her husband, a cat, two goats.

Choose How To Get Started

Presentations

Introduce the idea to your group or agency. Kathy takes you through the behavior science behind the training process and the training steps themselves as well as what we know about using our new tool (effectiveness, animal health and productivity, economics, etc.). The presentation includes lots of video of animals at work, interviews with ranchers whose animals have learned to eat weeds, and answers all the questions asked about the process over the last 7 years



Workshops

If you have a group interested in getting started this spring, an in-depth, day-long workshop is for you. Kathy covers the science and the training steps and then helps each individual create a training plan to meet his/her specific needs.

The workshop includes insights into lessons Kathy has learned from different projects, video and discussion of what to expect from animal trainees, and potential hurdles a trainer might encounter and how to overcome them.

Participants leave with a copy of the book and DVD "Cows Eat Weeds." Attendance at a workshop also includes two phone calls with Kathy during training so we can make sure you succeed.



Coaching Program

The coaching program is good for folks willing to try new things on their own but who want to get started quickly and easily.

Via phone, you'll go over the list of questions Kathy developed to help her write training plans. Based on your answers, she develops a complete training plan including information about your target weed(s), a list of what training feeds to buy adjusted to what's available locally, what to feed when, and how animals will behave. When you're comfortable with the plan, you begin training, calling Kathy whenever you have questions or concerns.

Coaching program participants also receive the "Cows Eat Weeds" book and DVD.



On-Site Projects

Each grazing season Kathy works on-site on projects that are unique and/or challenging because of the kind of weed animals are being trained to eat (i.e. leafy spurge), that involve a large group of ranchers in one area, or are opportunities to add to what we know about cows eating weeds.

If you have a project like this, contact Kathy. She can also provide you with materials to write solid, successful grant proposals.

"Kathy's teaching style is effective, knowledge of content is thorough, and her passion is contagious! Well done!"

"I expected a few new techniques. I experienced a paradigm shift. Thank you! "

Vermont Grazing & Livestock Conference workshop attendees

For more information contact Kathy:

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What People Are Saying

Economics

“Economically, if you compare the full cost of purchasing and applying [herbicide] to the small cost of training cows to feed themselves on a nutritious plant - well training cows is the smarter move hands down. When you spend a few dollars training your cows how to reap forage benefits from a weed, it’s all good. There’s no down side.”

John Wick and Peggy Rathmann,
Nicasio Native Grass Ranch,
California

Well there really is no good science on this, it’s way too new. What you can figure out is that the lower cost producers make more money 100% of the time, and this is a way to lower your costs in every respect.

John Morley, Economist



Effectiveness

“Today we’re doing the ‘happy cow dance!’ We went to see how the cows were doing on spotted knapweed and it was ALL GONE.”

Melissa Griffiths, Madison Valley
Ranchlands Group Weed
Committee

“The bonus was that they not only ate the milk thistle in pasture, but they ate the Italian thistle and the black mustard. It was easy! You can do it!”

Joe Morris, San Juan Bautista,
CA

“It’s so easy and it doesn’t take that much time out of your day. I don’t know why more people aren’t doing it.”

Jan Kløver
Ranch Resources, Sheridan, MT



Presentations

“I loved the gentle, out of the box, paced nature of today. wonderful work. Thank you.”

“Loved mix of information and work time, live presentation of info with video and photo documentation. You are a gifted teacher.”

“I love seeing conventional ideas/practices turned on their head and Kathy’s new program and her ideas do just that! It’s always a good idea to challenge the status quo. Keep on questioning!”

“What a nice presentation you gave. Not just the content, but the way it was put together!”

“This was motivational and inspirational!”

Comments from workshop and presentation evaluations.

“What I liked about the workshop: Totally amazing breakthrough. What I didn’t like: That it took 10,000 years grazing before you solved the problem.”

Vermont Grazing & Livestock Conference workshop attendee

Kathy has worked on projects in California, Colorado, Oregon, and Montana and will soon be headed to Vermont.

Her speaking engagements include appearances at: PASA, Brandon, Manitoba Grazing School, Northeast Pasture Consortium, Society for Range Management, Vermont Grazing and Livestock Conference, various GLCI meetings, Forage Council meetings in B.C., Saskatchewan and Alberta, Canada, and many more.