

PETE FERRELL

*The following was written in 1992 when my children were young, as a vision of a brighter future for them.*

*Tuesday, May 30, 2027*

*Dear Diary,*

This is my last day before returning to sedentary life for the next month. It seems that I'm more at home out here with the herd than I am at the ranch anymore. If it weren't for my children, I might request more time with this four-legged crowd. The kids are eager to do herd duty as soon as they are old enough.

Limiting each person's time with the herd to every other month has strengthened our community: life no longer seems split between work and non-work. I enjoy my "time off" and spend most of it working in the Beaumont community. Most people who live here now are either directly employed by the grazing co-op or an auxiliary business. The spiritual, recreational, and artistic activities here are amazing for a small town. Few people seem stressed by "work" which makes quality leisure events and civic volunteerism more common.

Our multi-species herd will reach a major market terminal in about 2 weeks, so I assume it will be somewhat smaller when I return, although it's hard to tell in this 90,000 head menagerie when a few are gone. A large grazing cooperative was an obvious solution to many problems created by CAFOs ... less fossil fuel usage, less pollution from run-off, improved water & mineral cycling. In short, the land has been restored. This blend of cattle, sheep, and goats does a good job of replacing a harvest. We sell most of our meat directly to individuals who live in the region. However, about twice a year we thin the excess marketable animals. They are processed locally and shipped out of the area by rail. This meat typically ends up in trendy coastal outlets which can market forage finished meat at a premium.

Yesterday I talked with my brother Jacob who is the co-op's meteorologist. He says we'll have to pick up our pace a bit, as dry weather will force us out of the southern Flint Hills region before the end of June. His satellite perspective is an essential part of the grazing plan which directs our swath of impact across the plains.

We marvel at how well the ranch has responded since we took down the fences and joined the co-op. Infrequent high impact has had a breathtaking effect on the health of the plant community. Although we still have a few grazing cells around for growing replacement livestock, the health of the prairie in the cells does not compare to the response we've seen from allowing our land to be grazed by the "big herd".

The herds of wildlife have also flourished and seem to follow us ... preferring the regrowth produced by our intense grazing pattern. Predators are not a problem for us and we accept the occasional loss as nature's way of keeping things in balance.

Living so close to life and death has a calming effect on me. My sedentary friends still don't understand my preference for this lifestyle. They think it odd that a person with a Masters in Range Ecology should chose to be a professional herder. They don't understand that it's not for the money.

~Lauren Beatrice Ferrell 



*Photo Courtesy of Pete Ferrell*

*Pete Ferrell has worked at the Ferrell Ranch (established by his great-grandfather in 1888) basically all his life. He was a full-time ranch hand from 1974 to 1980, when he became general manager upon the death of his father. In 1995, he co-founded and was president (2000) of the Tallgrass Prairie Producers Cooperative, a rancher-owned business for marketing forage-finished beef. From June of 2004 to December of 2005, he performed the duties of executive coordinator for the formation of the Tallgrass Beef Company, LLC owned by Bill Kurtis of Chicago, Illinois. He is the initiator and primary landholding member in the development of the Elk River Wind Farm, LLC. Pete was on the Board of Directors of Rancher's Original, which is creating an aggregate supply of range cattle for branded beef programs.*



*Photograph: David Ottenstein*