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Bass and Sandra Hyatt

Bass and Sandra are retired. Bass was a County Executive director for the Farm Service Agency. Sandra was a high school librarian. In addition to the cattle, Sandra manages a rental cabin on Brasstown Creek. Their three children, Seth, Amanda and Quincey help as needed. They are expecting their first grandchild in March—a boy!

Together, they are the fourth generation in the Hyatt family to live on the place. Bass Hyatt Sr. personally knew Bob Bell, the pioneer who settled here about 1865. The farm was a general purpose, subsistence farm until the last generation. The first settlers raised geese, tobacco, turkeys, chickens, pigs, cattle, horses, sheep, gardens and fruit. In the 1950s and 1960s, Bass Sr. produced grade A milk from a herd of about twelve cows. During the last forty years, they have specialized in a cow/calf operation using mainly Angus bulls. The farm is about 650 acres, with 180 acres in pasture. The remainder is forest. It is family owned by Bass and Sandra Hyatt, Virginia Hyatt Young, and David Hyatt. Bass Hyatt is the manager and David Hyatt has the hunting rights. All the Hyatt families live on the farm and have a strong sense of place. They now run about 90 brood cows.



Bass Hyatt, Farm Manager

There are about 30 acres of bottom land, 15 acres of second bottom, and the remaining 135 acres of pasture is steep and rough. The forest is steep mountain land with dark coves. Right now, the stocking rate is one cow per two acres of pasture. There are 3 creeks (Brasstown, Pinelog, and Trout Cove) that water the farm—as well as branches and springs. The streams are high quality—fish are eaten from them. Brasstown Creek flows for two miles through the farm and Pinelog Creek for one and one half miles.



Brasstown Creek



Upstream on Brasstown Creek

As the farm is a family resource for living, recreation, hunting and fishing, they have been very careful to protect the soil and water. During the 1930s and 1940s, the hills were planted in corn and wheat, which resulted in gullies and sheet erosion. This has been stabilized with permanent grasses and in some places, trees.

They have worked with the Extension Service, NRCS, FSA, the Upper Hiawassee Watershed Coalition (North Carolina Clean Water Management Trust Fund), the North Carolina Forest Service, and the North Carolina Soil and Water program at various times with different programs.



Bass instructing participants of "A Better Way Than Feeding Hay" workshop held on his farm by Extension & NRSC.



Participants help move fencing to demonstrate grazing and manure distribution strategies.

They belong to the Blue Ridge Mountain Cattlemen's Association, the North Carolina Cattlemen's Association, the Georgia Cattlemen's Association, and the North Carolina Forage and Grassland Council. Bass Jr. also traveled with a group from *The Stockman Grass Farmer* to Argentina to study their methods of cattle production.



Fence exclusion on Pinelog Creek



Exclusion fencing on Brasstown Creek

Their goal, years ago, was to clean up the place, sow the land in permanent grasses and stop the gullies and soil loss. "We wanted the place to look better, increase wildlife, and make a profit," Bass stated. They met with the NRCS supervisor and formulated a plan, cost shared by EQIP, to correct their problems. Conservation practices that they used were: miles of exclusion fencing, a mile of pressurized watering system with eleven waterers, two gravity flow water systems with two tile-type waterers for each system, different gravel and filter cloth stream crossings, heavy-use area repair, cattle lane improvement, and soil and pasture improvements.



Cattle waterer with concrete hog slats

They also received an Ag-Options grant through the NC Cooperative Extension Service to build complete cattle working facilities and holding pens. The NC Forest Service met with them and they made a plan to manage all the timber resources. They were then advised by the NC Wildlife Resource officer as to the best methods to manage their pastures and forests for wildlife regeneration. To keep current, they attend producer meetings and tours held by the NC Cooperative Extension Service at every opportunity.



"Bud Box" as a part of new working facility

In 2002, Bass decided to try strip grazing a stockpiled fescue winter pasture. Within 2 years, he began to graze through the winter without feeding any hay to the cowherd. As of 2013, strip grazing is second nature and he does so the year around with excellent results. He feeds hay and gluten meal only to the weaned calves and purchases all the hay and grain. Strip grazing makes for better manure distribution, less energy use by heavy equipment, stimulates soil biology, and encourages more diversity in the pasture plants. There are no tractor tire ruts or hay ring scars in wet times. Best of all, according to the Hyatts, it has been their success with wildlife. "We now have bears, foxes, coyotes, beavers, otters, raccoons, skunk, squirrels, rabbits, weasels, mink, opossum, and deer. My neighbors have seen a mountain lion! We have brown herons, turkeys, different kinds of hawks, osprey, grouse, Canada geese, and different songbirds," says Hyatt.





Strip grazing



Strip grazing continued

The Upper Hiawassee Watershed Coalition cost shared a project to deepen the channel and repair the banks and create deep pools on Brasstown Creek. The riparian areas were planted in trees. The banks now are stabilized. This was an extensive job that repaired almost 4,000 feet of creek bank.



Additional fenced riparian areas around farm

The strip-grazing program they now manage leaves a good cover of mature grasses on the ground most of the time. This corrects most soil loss problems and helps during drought. Of course, the pressure water system and the two gravity flow water systems allow the cattle to be excluded from the streams, thereby stopping the cattle from polluting.



Gravity flow cattle waterer



Gravel/filter cloth stream crossing on Pinelog Creek

The pastures are fertile with a 6.2 or higher pH and high potash and phosphate. The organic matter content is steadily increasing as the cattle stomp stems, stalks, and weeds into the ground as they graze. The idea is to encourage microbial activity in the soil. They are presently experimenting with different fertilizer rates and regularly use soil sampling as a tool.

At the 5-county Blue Ridge Mountain Cattlemen's Association meetings, of which Bass has been President as well as a member of the Board of Directors, he gives a forage report each month explaining any new techniques, new forages, or any other news about pastures or other forages. They also participate in community activities and host farm tours from time to time. Visitors to the vacation rental cabin observe and learn about their method of cattle production. Bass is or has been: President of the Clay County Library Board, charter President of the Cherokee County Museum Board, a member of the Small Farmers Initiative group, a member of the Clay County Extension Advisory Council, and served on the Board of Trustees for the First Methodist Church of Hayesville, North Carolina. Sandra is on the board of the Friends of the Library organization and they both attended a national cattlemen's tour held in Bozeman, Montana.



Rental cabin by Brasstown Creek

Because they are a fourth generation farm with affection, pride, recreation, and quality of life issues involved, they farm as a way of life. The esthetics, the sustainability and the conditions of the soil, air, and water claim first priority.

However, the way they farm with low-cost inputs proves to be most profitable also. "We have a lot to protect," Bass said. "The miles of riparian areas and the woodlands harbor great plant diversity."



Fenced riparian area on Brasstown Creek



Additional fenced riparian area

"Looking forward, we plan to operate with an emphasis on conservation, esthetics, and maintenance." In a few years, they may build another rental cabin. They expect a boost when their grass-fed genetics are manifested. Their conservation efforts are reasonably current. Presently, they are requesting NRCS and/or Soil and Water to cost share more exclusion fencing, another gravity water system, and a heavy-use area.

They plan to continue to strip graze with a daily fence movement and a six-month interval between total grazings. They also plan to continue to buy what hay they need for calves and discontinue grain

purchases. Twenty acres of bottom land, presently in permanent grasses, will be converted to summer/winter annuals.

Each year, they plan to spread layer manure on one-third of the pastures (60 acres) to correct any mineral or pH shortages. The cowherd, with the exception of the bred heifers and the old cows, will be rotationally grazed throughout the year including the winter months. By selling half of their yearlings in April, they hope to be able to increase to a 100-head cowherd. "We feel that it's more important to develop virtue, integrity, and affection within ourselves and to the Creation than it is to get bigger. We plan to host Sunday school and 4-H groups next summer and encourage them to develop a conservation ethic."

The collective Hyatt memories from when the bridge broke (bad times) and from when Bass Sr. received his WWI pension (good times) emanates from this place. The grist mill, the dairy, the native chestnut trees, the swinging bridge, old Col. Davidson, Bass Sr., and Bob Bell – their sign is still around, if you can read it. There is a rather secluded place here called the Still-House Cove.

"We are planning a transfer to the next generation. Times were rough when Grandma Viola was in charge. Bass Sr. grimly held on for 105 years without selling an acre. We believe the next generation will not cash out. That's what we call sustainability."