VGFA Mini-Grant: Bale Grazing (BG) vs Bedded Pack (BP) Comparison - Winters 2018 & 2019

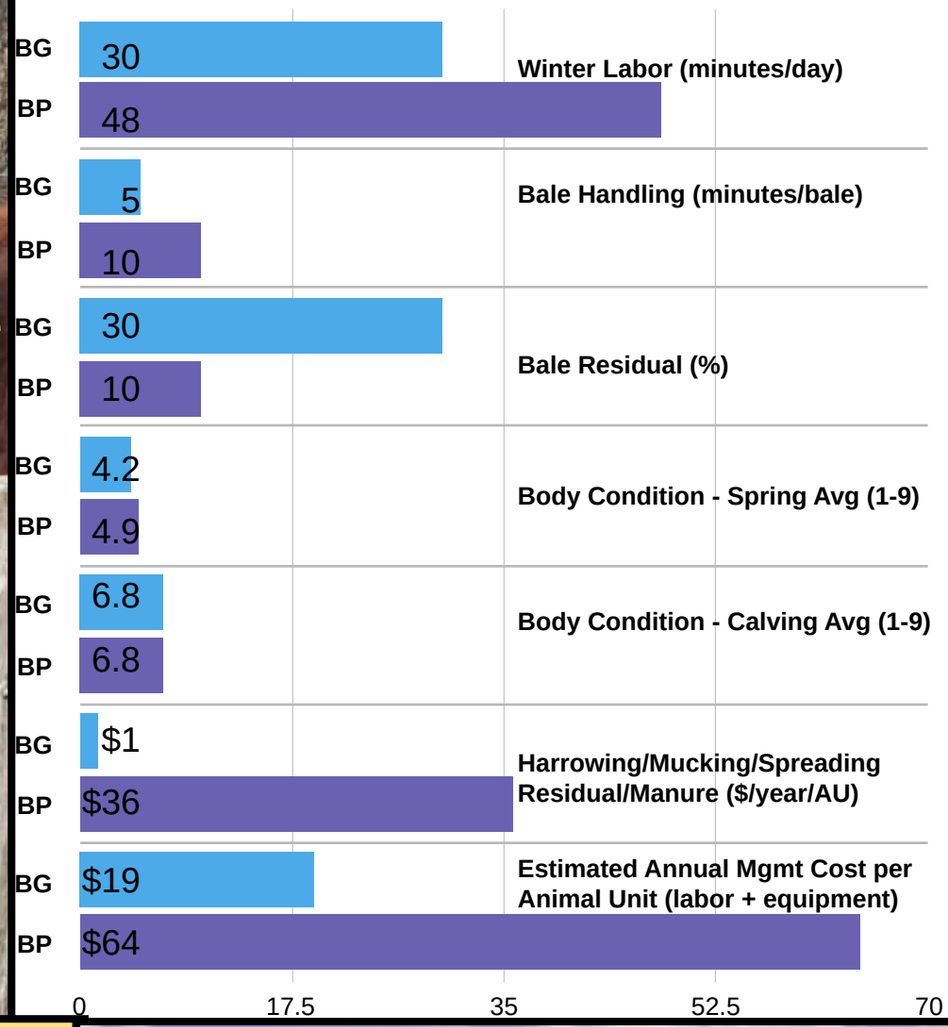
Context

- 10 acres BG on 35 acre of old ridge tilled corn field
- 4x5 dry net wrapped round bales, primarily 1st cut mixed grass hay
- Cattle herd moved daily to fresh bales
- Access to living shelter of mixed hard/softwood species on ledge
- BP uses free wood chips as bedding/carbon source
- BP bales stored undercover and placed 2x/week throughout winter
- BG bales all placed ahead of consumption directly after haying/purchase

Qualitative Pros & Cons of BG

(+) less time in winter season (when all bales placed ahead of consumption)
(+) reduced bale handling (when bales place in field at time of haying/purchase)
(+) eliminates added bedding (frozen ground and bale residual provide bedding)
(+) no need to muck/compost/spread manure/bedding/pack
(+) reduction in lice pressure
(+) increase in OM from bale residual
(-) feed hay loss due to weathering
(-) need frozen ground (soft ground can make BG a damaging practice)
(-) need to chain harrow (or similar) bale residual for even field distribution
(-) water/shelter access (new BG field annually presents water/shelter limitations)

Quantitative Cost Comparison BG vs BP



SUMMER 2019 NO TILL 7-WAY SUMMER ANNUAL GRAZING MIX + BIOCHAR ON 35 ACRES OF OLD RIDGE TILLED CORN FIELD

non-BG area observations

- no additional compaction from cattle
- abundance of volunteer clover
- smoothed existing corn ridges with disc

17 animal days per acre w/ 6" residual

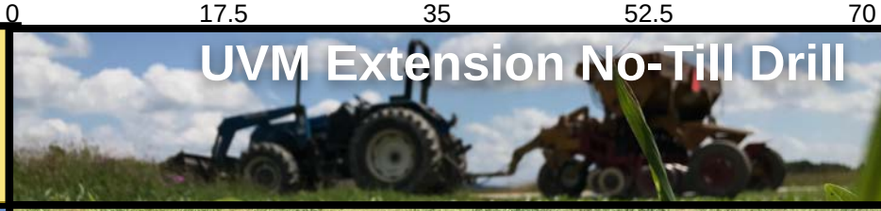
EVEN BUT LOWER GROWTH

BG area observations

- additional compaction from cattle
- no volunteer clover
- corn ridges were smoothed by cattle and residual hay

20 animal days per acre w/ 6" residual

PATCHY BALE RING GROWTH



500%+ increase seeded forage productivity in bale residual ring*

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