

Living a Life of Luxury

Andrew P. Griffith

Living a life of luxury conjures up different thoughts to different people. It may take the form of a monstrous cabin in the Alps, a beachside estate in the Bahamas, not having to look at price tags, or a private plane and pilot just awaiting the call. To more simple minded folks like me, living a life of luxury has more to do with faith, family, friends, food, and farming. Since this article is generally agrarian in nature and focuses on cattle 99 percent of the time, the luxury of farming will be the topic of discussion.

Why does anyone farm? Farm business operators farm as an occupation to provide for basic needs and wants. They also do it because they enjoy working on the land and producing livestock. Anyone who farms full-time must enjoy it, otherwise, they would not be willing to take the risk associated with farming. People who farm part-time but that generate more wealth with off farm jobs have a profit motivation in many cases as it relates to farming. However, the lifestyle and enjoyment of farming are often the key motivators behind this group.

What does this have to do with living a life of luxury? It seems to me that making more profit from the farm and reducing one's total labor simultaneously would be living the life of luxury on a farm. There is a familiar saying that a person has to "spend money to make money." Could the same also be true for labor? Could expending labor in the near term reduce total labor for the operation?

The great thing about cattle and crops is that they work for the farmer as long as Mother Nature provides the general nutrients of sunshine and rain at the appropriate time. However, cattle and crops do respond to management which usually requires spending some money and labor to return a more abundant crop and hopefully a larger paycheck. Thus, spending money on fertilizer, herbicides, animal health products, and supplemental feed can influence how crops and cattle produce and thus the return. These are all expenditures that generally see a return in less than a year, but what about longer term monetary and labor expenditures?

Most long term monetary and labor expenditures work more like a mutual fund than the immediate payout from applying nitrogen to a corn field or feeding a concentrate to calves. Some of the longer term management issues in my mind include liming fields, cleaning out fence rows, cross fencing, and tiling poorly drained fields. In other words, can building infrastructure return higher profits and reduce labor? The anecdotal evidence would say yes.

There are sure to be some readers agreeing and others disagreeing with the thought process. However, there are likely several readers that agree that this is possible on owned land, but it is not feasible on rented land. I am less certain about the answer on rented land as well, but based on recent actions it would appear I think it will be worth the effort. I have been in the process of updating some infrastructure and addressing soil nutrient deficiencies on a piece of rented ground, and I still have much more to do. However, I think I will reap the fruits of my labor via improved forage production, easier handling of cattle, less fence repair, and a few less flat tires.

There is no simple answer associated with each management practice yielding a 10 fold or 100 fold return. Producers should evaluate what long term investments (money or labor) will yield the greatest returns on their operations and put their resources into action. The answer may be that nothing can be done on an operation to reduce future labor needs and increase profits, but I am willing to bet that the majority of folks can identify at least one thing.

Time and money seem to be the two things everyone is short on these days, but that has more to do with priorities than actually being short of time and money. I plan on living a life of luxury while farming so I am going to try to make decisions that will increase my returns and reduce my labor. Hopefully it will turn out well.