This very abbreviated form of the checksheet is designed to stimulate critical thinking in planning a farm on which the primary land use is production of beef cattle. The sustainability of a farm relates to many factors revolving around farm management, use of resources and quality of life. The series of questions is intended to serve as an assessment of awareness rather than rating of management practices. Carefully think about how decisions made in one area impact the results in other areas of your farm or management.

After reviewing the preliminary information here, you may want to consider using the longer version of the checksheet for a more complete assessment of your farm.

INVENTORY OF FARM RESOURCES AND MANAGEMENT

Size of farm ____________________________
Number of: Mature cows ________ Replacement heifers ________ Stockers ________
Other types of animal enterprises ________________________________
Breeds of cattle ________________________________
Number of pastures on farm ________ Number of ponds and water sources ________________________________
Livestock market and months you market in ________________________________
Months you calve in ________________________________

How many acres of the following do you have?

- Predominantly cool season perennial grasses ________________________________
- Predominantly warm season perennial grasses ________________________________
- Mixture of warm and cool season grasses ________________________________
- Cool season annuals ________________________________
- Warm season annuals ________________________________
- Pastures that can be stockpiled for late fall/winter grazing ________________________________

Which practices are part of your grazing system? short duration, slow rotation, continuous

Give major soil types and productivity indexes for the farm ________________________________

When and with what do you fertilize? ________________________________

What are the top five strengths of your operation? ________________________________

What are the top five problems? ________________________________

Do you have written goals for your operation? ________ If yes, briefly give an overview.

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INSTRUCTIONS: In the margin for each question on the following pages, place a checkmark if it needs further thought or leave blank if it is not important.

I. CATTLE AND FORAGE PROGRAM
A. Herd health and reproductive management
   _____ What is the overall appearance of your whole cattle herd? ________________________________
   _____ Do your cattle appear to be thrifty, contented, and performing to your satisfaction? __________________
   Do you
   _____ pregnancy check cows? ____________ fertility test bulls? ________________________________
   _____ have a defined breeding/calving season? ________________________________
   _____ calve the majority of your cows the first 21 days of calving season? ________________________________
   _____ routinely condition score cows? ____________ before breeding? ________________________________
   _____ have a clean area for calving? ____________ move pairs to clean area after calving? ________________________________
   _____ feed and water in clean areas? ________________________________
   _____ have handling facilities which minimize stress to livestock and handler? ________________________________
   _____ use handling techniques that minimize stress? ________________________________
   _____ What vaccinations do you give? ________________________________
   _____ When, how often and on what basis do you deworm? ________________________________

Do you have problems with
   _____ open cows (> 10%) or late calving cows? ____________ calving difficulty (pull >10% of the calves)? ________________________________
   _____ calf scours and/or pneumonia? ____________ internal/external parasites? ________________________________
   _____ grass tetany? ____________ fescue toxicoses (or heat stress)? ________________________________
   _____ other health problems? ________________________________

Are animals stressed
   _____ when worked? ____________ during weather extremes? ________________________________
   _____ at weaning time? ____________ do you have wind breaks in winter? ________________________________
   _____ do you use low-stress weaning techniques? ________________________________

B. Breeding, genetics and selection program
   _____ What are the goals of your breeding program? ________________________________
   _____ What traits do you select for or cull against when choosing sires or replacements? ________________________________
   _____ On what basis do you sell surplus animals? ________________________________
   _____ On what basis do you choose herd sires and where do you purchase sires? ________________________________
   _____ Why did you choose the breeds you have? ________________________________
   _____ Do you raise or purchase replacement heifers? ________________________________

C. Nutrition management
   _____ Does your forage base match your animals' needs--can you meet those needs with pasture? __________________
   _____ Does your forage management program ensure adequate forage availability? __________________
   _____ Could changing calving season allow you to more adequately meet nutrition requirements of cows with forages you have rather than changing the forage base? __________________
   _____ Do you cut hay at the proper time to insure good quality? __________________
   _____ Do your animals spot graze pastures to the point that some areas are severely overgrazed and some areas undergrazed and then have to be clipped? __________________
   _____ Do your cattle have access to all your pastures in late winter when cool season forages first start to break dormancy and keeps the forage from growing rapidly? __________________
   _____ Does your haying program include cutting pastures which are not needed for grazing rather than
allocating areas of the farm just for hay production? ________________________________

_____ Do you have enough pastures to set up a rotational grazing program, i.e. move cattle at least once a week? ____________ If not, can pastures be divided easily? ________________________________

_____ Do your sources of water for livestock prevent dividing pastures? ________________________________

_____ Are special grazing techniques such as forward grazing used to meet the needs of animals with higher nutrition requirement than others and also utilize available forage? ________________________________

_____ Do you prepare your cattle for winter by adding condition in the fall? ________________________________

_____ Are some of the mature cows too thin? __________________________________________________________

_____ If spring calving, have calves been weaned to decrease nutrition requirements of cows, and allow cows to regain weight by putting them on good quality pastures? ____________________________________________

_____ If fall calving, are cows in condition to rebreed on schedule? ________________________________

_____ Have pastures been conditioned for putting weight gain on cows by stockpiling high quality forage? (over 2500 lbs of dry matter per acre of vegetative forage)? __________________________________________

II. FARM MANAGEMENT

A. Records

_____ Do you make good use of a record-keeping system? ________________________________________________

_____ Do you know your actual cost of production per acre? ____________ per animal? ________________

_____ Do you know what it costs to produce, harvest, and feed a bale of hay? ______________________________

_____ graze an acre of pasture? ____________ graze one cow for one day? ________________________________

B. Farm planning

_____ Would diversification with other animal species add some benefit or add extra income? ________________

_____ Are you testing soils in each pasture or field at least every three years? ______________________________

_____ Are you making effective use of your fertilizer expenditures? ________________________________

_____ Could you decrease N fertilizer through more effective use of legumes? ______________________________

_____ Are you using chicken litter/animal manures/municipal sludge products? ______________________________

_____ Would using those products be more cost-effective than using commercial fertilizer? ________________

_____ Would using components of fertilizer, i.e. K or N, be more effective? ________________________________

_____ Would using lime allow a decrease in fertilizer expenditures? ________________________________

_____ Do you own more equipment than you need? ______________________________________________________

_____ Could you decrease the equipment you need if you relied more on grazing? ______________________________

_____ Do you buy equipment for tax reasons, even though you don’t need the equipment? ________________

_____ Does that equipment expenditure for tax reasons really increase your net income? ________________

_____ What are your primary purchased feed expenditures? protein, energy, minerals, hay

_____ How do you know which of the purchased feeds you actually need? ________________________________

C. Marketing

_____ Do you market your animals when the price is best? ________________________________________________

_____ Could you change your management (forage, calving season, etc.) to allow you to sell cattle ___ on a more timely basis? ________________________________

_____ Would it be cost effective to retain ownership of your cattle through another growth phase? ________________

_____ Could you produce a more marketable product with a change in your breeding program? ________________

_____ Are you in an area where niche marketing could be established? ________________________________

III. ASSESSMENT OF PASTURES, SOILS AND WATERSHED

A. Pasture assessment

What are your pasture management goals? __________________________________________________________________

_____ Do you need better quality forage available? ______________________________________________________
_____ Do you know how individual pastures rank in productivity? ________________________________

_____ Are there spots of bare ground within pastures? ________________________________

_____ Do you have any erosion problems? ________________________________

_____ Is the pasture grazed fairly uniformly or are there areas of spot grazing? __________________

_____ Is there adequate but not excessive residue in the pasture? ________________________________

_____ Are the animals doing a good job of controlling the edible weeds? ________________________________

_____ Could changes in water/mineral location or the pasture shape impact the grazing pattern? _____________

_____ Is water runoff excessive, especially on slopes? ________________________________

_____ Are pastures resting long enough to allow plant regrowth and maintain root reserves? ______________

B. Soil assessment

_____ Do you have soil maps of your farm and understand the productivity index of each soil type? ________

_____ Do you have specific problems to address, such as fragipans, poor drainage, compaction? ________

_____ What is the microbial activity in your soil? __________ What does soil smell like? ________________

_____ When was your last soil test? __________________ Do you routinely use lime? ______________________

_____ What is the organic matter level in your pastures/fields? ________________________________

_____ How many days does it take grass or crops to exhibit drought stress? __________________________

_____ Do you have any soil nutrient deficiencies or imbalances that impair production? ________________

_____ Are soil fertility levels adequate to meet forage production targets? ______________________________

_____ Would a change in fencing allow better use of pastures according to productivity of soil? ______________

C. Watershed assessment

_____ What are the water drainage patterns into and from your farm? ________________________________

_____ Do you have an understanding of the nutrient flow on your farm? ________________________________

_____ Do you have major riparian areas, with flowing water in them most of the time? __________________

_____ Do you allow livestock frequent limited access to manage the vegetation of riparian areas? __________

_____ Do you time your fertilizing or spreading of litter/manure to prevent runoff of nutrients? ______________

_____ Are farm ponds full of algae? __________ Does your soil absorb and retain rainfall? ________________

IV. FARM GOALS

_____ As you consider the goals of your farming operation, are you examining your livestock production program to become more cost effective? ________________________________

_____ assessing the soil, plant, and water resources? ________________________________

_____ analyzing your marketing program and the diversity of products available to market? ________________________________

_____ evaluating your quality of life from a family and community perspective? ________________________________

V. SUMMARY

Now that you have completed the assessment of your farm, go back through the questions you indicated as high priority items to increase economic or environmental sustainability. Then use the sustainability manual to explore potential changes in your management program or planning. Spend time reviewing the areas which could be emphasized to allow you to meet your goals.

_____ Have your perceptions of your weaknesses and strengths changed? ________________________________

_____ What are the highest priority areas for you to emphasize? ________________________________

_____ Have you put on paper your goals for your family and your operation? ________________________________