FLAT POINT FARM
126 Road to Great Neck
West Tisbury, MA 02575

October 31, 2023

Flat Point Farm has been in operation since 1939, when it was purchased by Arnold M. Fischer, Sr. He first worked it as a dairy farm, known as "Island Guernsey Farm." It was repurposed as a sheep and beef farm in the early 60s. It has primarily been an animal farming operation where hay is cut and square-baled to feed livestock in the winter.

We currently have 5 cows, 12-13 year-round sheep with their lambs (seasonal), 5 dairy goats, 2 pigs (seasonal), and 60 laying hens on the 91 acre farm. The largest grazing area (approximately 25 acres) is split into four fields so that the animals can be moved from pasture to pasture and allow the unused areas to rest. In the early 1990s, fencing was put in to keep the animals from gaining access directly to Tisbury Great Pond. The erosion the animals were causing is now completely recovered and the shore is covered in native grasses and shrubs, which act as a nitrogen sponge.

There is also a three acre pasture east of the main barn used for the cattle and sheep in the winter, roughly mid-December through April, when they are moved there from the pasture by the pond. During these months, the sheep are sometimes in the barn. The dairy goats have a winter paddock. In the spring, summer, and fall, the dairy goats are moved regularly using picket lines and movable electric fencing. The two pigs are near the barn from June to November.

There is a half-acre market garden run by Lydia Fischer, who now lives on the farm and sells her vegetables at the Farmer's Market as "The Garden Farm." There are five other small kitchen gardens spread over the farm. A minimal amount of fertilizer is used on the gardens and most of it comes from the animals on the farm. We currently do not have a manure pile as most of what the animals produce is used in our gardens. What we don't use we sell to customers who come collect it themselves directly from the barns. The chickens are kept in two pens with concrete floors by the barns.

Flat Point Farm is a large farm and supports far fewer animals than it could, which means the impact to the land is minimal. The University of Massachusetts Amherst defines and recommends stocking rates in this way:

Stocking Rates

Dairy Cow Stocking Rates | Center for Agriculture, Food, and the Environment at UMass Amherst

> USDA defines one thousand pounds of live weight as one animal unit (AU). Animal Density (AD) is defined as (AU)/grazed acre. Stocking Rate is a function of animal density including consideration of percentage of the time the animals are on the pasture. A general starting ratio for stocking is 0.5 (500 lbs of animal grazing per acre). A Jersey cow might be as much as one animal unit (1000 lb), so 2 acres of "average" pasture would be recommended per cow. Five to fifteen sheep or goats might also constitute one AU. Specific starting points for stocking rate vary according to the quality of the pasture. For example, 20 acres of "average" pasture land could support ten 1000 pound cows at a stocking rate of 0.5. Subdividing the 20 acres into four-5 acre pastures, rotating the pastures, and maintaining them well, would allow you to keep more than 10 cows on these pastures. Rotating 12 such cows on four 5 acre pastures would give an Animal Density of 2.4, with an overall stocking rate of 0.6 since the cows are only grazing a pasture ¼ of the time. Note that animal density should be much higher than 0.5 if animals are only grazing the pasture a fraction of the time. Use the following table to help adjust stocking rates to your own situation. In general the higher the AD, the more intensive the pasture management required.

Here is the calculation for Flat Point:
3 cows, 2 yearlings = 4.4 AUs
25 sheep and lambs = 5 AUs
5 goats = 1 AUs

Total = 10.4 AUs

50 acres / [(10.4 Animal Units) X 6 months)] = .80 acres/AU

Based on these calculations we need only 8.3 acres of land to support the animals we currently have. The land is very sparsely stocked and the animals are not wearing out the land.

Fertilizer is not used on our hay fields. Animals are not grazed on the 21 acre hay field at the north portion of the farm. Manure is sometimes spread on the north hay field.

We feel the low stock rates at Flat Point Farm along with the utilization of rotational grazing means there is very little in the way of nitrogen leaching.