

Buffalo in Winter Pasture.



On the left is a twelve-year-old bison cow. Bill, our herd bull is on the right.

We bought Bill from the Blue Mounds State Park herd in the summer of 2014. He was a two-year-old at that time. In the Fall of 2015, he got a promotion to herd bull when I harvested his predecessor. The previous Bill was ten years old and developing some bad habits. He made perfectly fine hamburger. We keep less than ten cows and therefore need only one herd bull. There are always younger bulls in the herd but since those bulls are harvested before they reach three, they are not big enough to challenge the herd bull. At the time of Bill's promotion, a year ago, he was no taller than a mature cow. As you can see, his hump has grown substantially. His weight is around 1200 pounds. The average cow next to him is one thousand pounds at most. Bill should keep growing until he is eight or more. By then he should weigh between 1600 and 2000 pounds.

Bill's horns, physique and coat are developing very nicely. He is physically very active (read between the lines here), well-mannered, gentle with the younger bison, and calm.

The cow is the senior female in the herd. She is not the oldest, but she is the highest status cow. She produces a good calf every year. She will probably continue to do so until she is in her twenties. Bison live longer than cattle.

The bison are standing in a pasture of native prairie grasses. Switchgrass, Big Blue Stem, Indian Grass, and Little Blue Stem are all visible in the photo. The pasture was grazed twice in early 2016. The last

grazing was at the beginning of July. These native grasses are identified as “warm season” plants. That means they do well in summer heat and produce seeds in late summer. I purposely held the herds out through the summer and fall so that the plants could produce seeds. As the bison winter graze, they will work the seeds into the soil along with manure. This process plants the seeds thus thickening the sward for the future.

In some areas of the pasture where the plant density is low, we will inter-seed cool season grasses, legumes, and forbs early in the spring. A greater variety of plants will make the pasture more productive and accelerate soil building.

I will place hay bales in the thinner areas of this pasture. The bison are standing in such a thin area. The hay will supplement the native grasses to assure an adequate diet for the animals. Doing so will also improve the soil and stimulate a denser sward of plants.

I will post a photo and article on “Winter Bale Grazing” soon. Best regards. Tom

Link to our Facebook page.

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