



Neil Dennis's fence crosser mounts on front of his utility vehicle at an angle, allowing him to drive right over a fence wire and bypass gates. Note wire reel holder and adjustable pigtail post holder.

He Geared Up For Fast Fencing

Neil Dennis can put up a quarter mile of fence in 9 minutes. The grazing guru needs to be fast, considering he moves his 1,000-head herd of stockers as many as 10 times a day. Dennis matches paddock size to grass conditions, cattle and weather. Where he puts up fence varies day by day.

"Before I came up with this system, I would spend all day just moving fence," recalls Dennis. "Now I can move the cattle in a few minutes. Without tools like the Batt-Latch automatic gate release (see story below), my Reel Ease, and my fencing cart, I couldn't do what I am doing."

Dennis was the first grazer in North America to put the solar powered Batt-Latch to work in his pastures. He can use it to release cattle into new paddocks automatically. Now the Canadian distributor, he not only sells them but trains customers in how they work. He shares some of his other fencing tools and techniques as well.

"I use special temporary (non-metal) posts with metal sleeves to start and stop my temporary lines," he says. "I can attach the Batt-Latch to them, and it stays in place. I string the cross wire to it and then hang the Reel from another one at the far end."

If the Batt-Latch with its timed release of a paddock gate makes changing paddocks easy, Dennis' Reel Ease makes it fast. The polybraid wire reel holder is designed to mount to the front rack on an ATV or the front bumper of a side-by-side. Another accessory is the adjustable pigtail post holder.

Once he has attached the wire to the temporary post, he heads out across the

field. He sets the pigtail holder at an angle that delivers pigtails to his hand. The wire automatically unrolls as he goes.

"I pause the side-by-side, step a post in, hook the wire to it and go on," he says. "At the end of the line, I push in the temporary post with the sleeves, remove the reel from the Reel Ease, wrap it around the post and let it hang."

Pulling up a fence is just as fast. Dennis unhooks the wire at the end opposite the reel. He resets the angle on the arm for the pigtail posts. As he goes by, he pulls them up and slips them back on the holder where they slide away from him. When he is back to the reel, he detaches it from the temporary post and winds up the wire.

"I carry a battery-powered drill with an adapter to match the square shaft on the reel," says Dennis. In no time at all, the wire is back on the reel.

Another valuable tool is the fencing cart. It has an assortment of racks, each designed to hold specific posts and gear.

"One rack holds just pigtail posts," explains Dennis. "They are all kept in line so I can quickly grab the number I need. If they are in a pile, I would lose time untangling them."

If Dennis wants, he doesn't even have to open a gate to move the cattle to their next paddock. He uses lifter posts. The steel posts have insulators recycled from an area utility and attach above cattle head height. Electricity continues to flow, but the cattle can pass under.

Another handy tool is his Gwennie, a fence



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crosser. Named for a younger sister who used to open gates for him when they were young, the fence crosser lets him bypass gates. Made from square tubing, it mounts to the front of his side-by-side at an angle. He has similar fence crossers mounted to his tractors and other equipment.

"It lets me drive right over a fence wire," he says. "My Yamaha side-by-side has a belly pan that keeps the wire sliding underneath. I never open gates anymore."

Dennis is doing more and more speaking and consulting on the benefits of "mob grazing" and the fencing tools that make it possible. He plans to start selling his Reel Ease attachment this fall, as well as a CD on fast fencing techniques and tools.

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Polybraid wire reel holder mounts on front of an ATV or utility vehicle and is operated by a cordless drill.

Timed Latch Opens Gates Automatically

The solar-powered "Batt-Latch" gate release lets your livestock move to fresh grass even when you aren't around. Developed in New Zealand, the timed release is designed to work with nearly any type of gate although it's especially suited for electric fence spring gates and intensive grazing systems.

"It's great for changing paddocks when intensive grazing dairy, sheep or beef," says Mike Fries, MSF Farm, LLC. He is the U.S. distributor for the Batt-Latch system. "It has been used in New Zealand for years, but has really taken off here recently with sales mostly by word of mouth."

The built-in keypad and screen make setting a release time easy. The timer can be set up to 4 times in a day for multiple paddock moves. The integrated solar panel and battery maintain constant power, day or night.

Fries has first-hand experience with the Batt-Latch, having used it in his own grazing operation. He recommends positioning the gate and release in the middle of a paddock fence. While it takes a little more time setting up the fence, it means less crowding when it

opens than with gates located in corners.

"When the spring gate is released, livestock move through in a funnel shape and spread out," says Fries. "With a corner-mounted gate, some animals come through and move up the wire, while others stay on the previous side."

Fries says it takes young animals about 3 days before they are listening for the click of the release. He says most customers end up buying multiple units.

"If you only change pastures once or twice a day, one unit will do," he says. "It's very flexible and can easily be moved to a new location. If you use high intensity, short period grazing, a pair of releases works best."

The Batt-Latch also can be used for other purposes, such as timed release of flood irrigation water, release of farm dogs from kennels, and release of chickens from coops during the day or closure of coops at night. It can also trigger water pumps or other electronic or mechanical switches. Fries' customers have reported some novel uses of their systems beyond simple controlled



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grazing.

"One customer in Texas uses it to catch wild hogs," he says. "A lady in Alabama has a diabetic horse. She uses it to release her horse into the pasture at 3 a.m. when plant sugars are at their lowest point. Another customer feeds her horses separately, using the release to turn them into a common pen later."

The Batt-Latch has a built-in solar panel and energy storage. It's priced at \$395 for the spring gate style. A \$95 adapter lets you use it for pipe gates as well.

"We'll soon be coming out with a cell phone-ready remote," says Fries. "It has been proven in New Zealand, but requires a U.S. compatible chip."

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