

# Watering System Boosts Range Productivity

When he bought his southern Idaho ranch, Jed Heaton put in pipes, valves, floats and troughs to keep cattle grazing, not walking for water. It worked so well that his neighbors wanted similar systems. Before long he had a business helping other ranchers develop springs and ponds into permanent watering systems. At his son's suggestion, he calls it ThirstyCows.

Heaton started doing his own installations out of frustration. "The first contractor I hired to put in a system on my ranch didn't show up," recalls Heaton. "The second showed up, but I had to haul around 4 pieces of equipment for him."

Heaton knew he could do a better job himself. For the past 18 years he has done just that, putting in systems for other farmers and ranchers across a 5-state area.

His water system installations can involve miles of pipe, with valves and floats feeding troughs made from mining equipment tires.

The troughs start out as 12-ft. tall and 5-ft. wide tires. He cuts each one in half to make 2 tanks 12 ft. in diameter and about 27 in. deep.



**Joe Heaton installs underground HDPE pipe to help ranchers develop springs and ponds into permanent watering systems. He uses a dozer to pull a vibrating plow and attaches a reel carrier to the blade.**

When he started, he made his own plow with a long ripper tooth that could penetrate up to 52 in. for laying the pipe. He hooked the plow to a dozer and built a reel carrier that hangs on the dozer blade.

"If I need to push out a tree or clear brush, I just unhook the reel and use the blade," he says.

Heaton's system worked even better after he replaced his ripper tooth plow with a Bron V100 vibrating plow. "It's amazing how it can go through 4 to 5-ft. brush and small trees," says Heaton. "The plow just slides off to one side or another. With the ripper, I had to pull straight through the root masses or make several passes with the blade."

Another big improvement came as he started working with high-density polyethylene (HDPE) pipe. Initially he had used pvc pipe.

"HDPE pipe is amazing," says Heaton. "It can handle being on top of the ground or freezing solid without breaking when full of water. It withstands things no other pipe can."

Heaton has installed so much HDPE pipe that he now sells it and other supplies in bulk to other contractors and ranchers who want to install themselves. He still installs pipe, as much as 200 miles of it this past year, but prefers to teach ranchers how to do the trough installations themselves.

"We install everything underground, but they do the rest," says Heaton. "On a good

day, we can do 3 to 4 miles of pipe. We still do systems that require 25 to 50 troughs."

Heaton is a good salesman for his systems. He quickly saw the benefits with his own. "We put troughs in every place we could, capturing water from small springs," he recalls. "The cows spread out to graze, making better use of forage instead of hanging around the water trough. Not hanging around together helped with pneumonia and sickness too."

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## Barn Is Perfect Venue For Axe Throwing

When Jeremy Andrews and a few friends started throwing axes for fun in 2015, they had no idea it would lead to an official league, and throwers getting "nerdy" about axe types and learning heritage skills like forging, handle-making and precision axe sharpening.

Andrews set up targets against a barn on his 10-acre property on the outskirts of Battle Creek, Mich. Appropriately, the league is called BTL AXE, named after the call letters for a former private airport in Battle Creek.

"It's an old barn that needs to be sided anyway," Andrews says of the facility the league currently uses - on the outside in nice weather and on the inside during the winter. The league got started when Andrews gave his 12 groomsmen axes for gifts and threw a post wedding axe-throwing party in 2015. With encouragement from his wife, Erin, they joined the WATL (World Axe Throwing League). In the fall, 22 members met once a week for 8 weeks, and Andrews expects 44 members for the winter league.

"It's like bowling for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I think people flock to the new and unusual, so I don't know if it will be huge 10 years from now, but I think it will grow," he says.

Axe throwing is an inexpensive sport to get into, with hatchets costing as little as \$8. Membership fees run \$160 for 8 weeks with 40 throws each week. The fee helps cover the costs of the targets made of 2 by 10 SPF wood. Though targets are soaked with water to make them last longer, the center target is usually replaced at least once each week. Andrews also put in fencing between the throwing lanes. Two throwers share the 12-ft. wide spaces and simultaneously throw at targets 12 ft. away.

Points are given for hitting the 4-in. bullseye (6) or rings (4, 3, 2 and 1). On the 10th throw of the 4 rounds, throwers can opt to aim at a blue ball on the outer edge for 10 points.



**A few years ago Jeremy Andrews and friends started throwing axes for fun, which led to an official league with targets set up against a barn. Axe styles vary to suit each thrower.**



Axe styles vary to suit each thrower, but must meet weight and length regulations set by WATL. The league follows the organization's safety requirements and adds on some of its own.

"Safety is No. 1," Andrews says, and from the beginning he set up rules that include his right to remove throwers he deems unsafe.

It has become so addictive for some, that a couple members now forge their own axe heads and another makes handles using wood from trees on Andrews' property.

Already, Andrews has booked bachelorette and birthday parties and hosted corporate axe-throwing events. With a trailer and portable gates, he will make axe throwing mobile, taking it wherever customers are interested.

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