



## Cows are Turning Deserts Back Into Grassland By Acting Like Bison

Author: Sara Burrows | November 30, 2017



**The Savory Institute is transforming 40 million acres of desert back into grassland by “rewilding” cows and other domesticated grazing animals.**

Two thirds of the land on Earth is now desert or in the process of becoming desert, according to world-renowned ecologist and environmentalist Allan Savory.

If you know anything about deserts, you know that’s not good news, as [neither humans nor many other species can survive very well in them.](#)

Responsible for the collapse of many civilizations and now threatening us globally, Savory says humanity has never understood the causes of desertification. But the fact that it began around 10,000 years ago and has accelerated dramatically in the last 200 gives us a clue, he says.

Agriculture also made its debut on the planet around 10,000 years ago, and industrial agriculture began around 200 years ago.

The combination of desertification, an exponentially growing human population and climate change leave humanity facing a perfect storm of apocalyptic proportions, Savory says in the famous Ted Talk below.

But not to worry, he says, cows, buffalo, sheep, goats and other grazing animals can save us... if they are allowed to graze the way they did before they were domesticated.



We're told desertification is only happening in arid areas of the world, Savory says.

“But if you look into the soil of much of the remaining grassland, you'll see that it's bare and covered with a crust of algae, leading to increased runoff and evaporation.”

When we damage soils, we release carbon into the atmosphere, he says.

### **Livestock: the problem and the solution**

Savory grew up in Africa loving wildlife and hating livestock because he was taught they were to blame for grassland destruction.

But when he moved to the United States years later, he was shocked to find national parks desertifying “as badly as anything in Africa” and there had been no livestock allowed in the parks for over 70 years

He looked into all the projects where cattle had been removed from prairie land to stop desertification, and found they had accomplished the opposite:



Climate change researchers attributed the change to “unknown processes.”

Eventually, Savory came to understand it wasn't grazing animals themselves that were the problem; it was the way they were grazing.

Since the dawn of domestication livestock have over-grazed one area after the next, because of sedentary farmers that rarely allow them to move.

And in the last 50-years, well-intentioned environmentalists have only made the problem worse by over-correcting and removing grazing animals from “protected” lands altogether.

Over-grazing is destructive, but apparently under-grazing can be just as bad or worse, according to Savory.

What we have failed to understand, he says, is that grasslands were created, over millions of years, by very large herds of grazing animals.



They traveled in large herds to protect themselves from predators. The difference between large herds of wild grazers and factory-farmed cattle today, is that the former were constantly on the move.

“Large herds dung and urinate all over their own food, so they have to keep moving.”

It was the *movement* that created the perfect balance of grazing to keep grasslands thriving, he said.

In short, “when you take grazers off the land and lock them away in vast feedlots, the land dies,” said Prince Charles, summarizing what he’d learned from Savory’s research in his 2012 address to the [International Union for Conservation of Nature](#).

Where grazing animals have been removed, governments have resorted to burning decaying grasslands in a desperate attempt to regenerate them. Savory says the process that leaves the soil bare, releases carbon, and creates devastating air pollution.

“We are burning in Africa, every single year, more than one billion hectares of grassland,” he says. “And almost nobody is talking about it.”

Savory believes desertification is a bigger contributor to climate change than fossil fuels. And, if it continues, we will be unable to stop climate change even after we have eliminated the use of fossil fuels, he says.

### **“Only livestock can save us”**

Because wild grazing animals have been mostly wiped off the planet, Savory says there is “only one option left” for humanity:

“To use livestock, bunched and *moving*, as a proxy for former herds and predators, and mimic nature.”

“There is no other alternative left to mankind,” he says.

The Savory Institute is in the process of restoring nearly 40 million acres of grassland on 5 continents, by doing just that:



A ranch in the Karoo Desert of South Africa, saved by natural grazing methods.

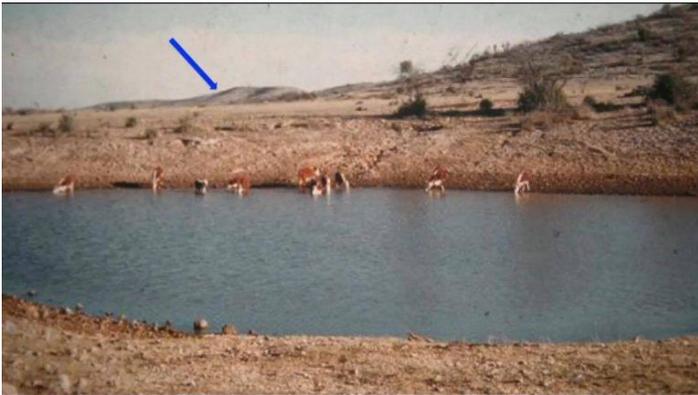
The organization reversed desertification in Zimbabwe by increasing cattle and goats by 400 percent and integrating them with elephants, buffalo and giraffes:



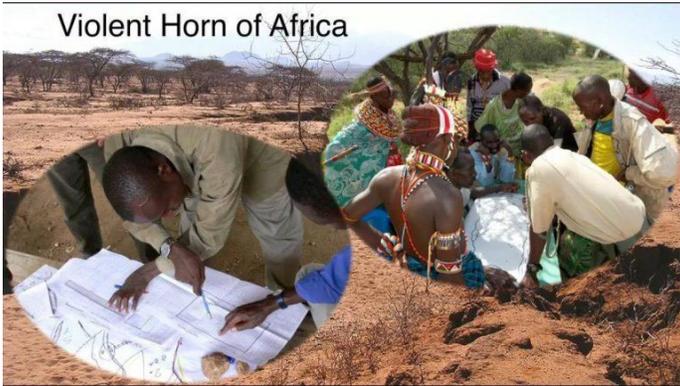
It put a flock of 25,000 sheep in Patagonia and saw a 50% increase in the production of the land in the first year.



“This land in Mexico was in terrible condition,” Savory points out in a slide show;



Pastoralists in the violent Horn of Africa say Savory’s rotational grazing method is their only chance for survival, as 95 percent of their land can only feed people from animals.



If we do this to even half the world's grassland, Savory says we can take enough carbon out of the atmosphere to take us back to pre-industrial levels of CO<sub>2</sub>, while feeding far more people than we are currently capable of.

The US Department of Agriculture (which many of us realize is basically a trade organization for Big Ag) published a series of studies attempting to refute Savory's methods, [concluding](#) rotational grazing systems found "few, if any, consistent benefits over continuous grazing."

The Savory Institute published its own [portfolio](#) of independent studies in response to its critics, basically providing modern-day evidence that mimicking the way mega-fauna have grazed for millions of years works.

For more info, grab a copy of Savory's book [\*The Grazing Revolution: A Radical Plan to Save the Earth\*](#):

