

George's own words

The latest rage is "regenerative" farming and ranching. The argument is that livestock (if properly managed--a big if of course) can sequester carbon and help reduce climate change. This overview by Mike Hudak is very informative if not a bit wonky. Stay with it. Its overall message is excellent.

Many ill-informed people, including members of the Sierra Club, Audubon, TNC, etc. looking to promote livestock grazing, not to mention the ranchers and their proponents have bought into the Allan Savory myth that livestock grazing promotes soil carbon sequestration. The problem is you can't just look at soil carbon sequestration alone.

There is a lot of nuance to this issue, but here is one very good critique that looks at just the issue of whether methane emissions from cattle outweigh any soil carbon sequestration that results from grazing. Spoiler: grazing results in a net increase in carbon (as methane) in the atmosphere.

Mine you even where sequestration does occur, there is more nuance than most advocates of livestock grazing acknowledge. For instance, soil carbon in the top layers of soil is easily lost during drought. Different ecosystems have lower and greater potential for soil carbon storage. Moist soils in the eastern US can store far more carbon than the arid West. But nearly all grazed soils in the east are pasture created by removing forests which can store far more carbon than pasture. There are other considerations as well.

Bottom line- grazing emits more methane than carbon stored in soil due to livestock production.