

CASE STUDY:

Mike Williams, Diamond W Cattle Company

Ranch Overview:

Mike Williams runs Diamond W Cattle Company, a cow-calf and stocker operation in the high desert mountains of Los Angeles County, California, where elevation ranges from 3,000 to over 5,000 feet. His rugged terrain includes steep ridges, canyons and patches of flat ground that offer limited grazing but breathtaking views. The ranch is both remote and resourceful — requiring four-wheel drives, horseback riding and, at times, sheer determination to manage.

Diamond W is primarily cow-calf based, but his stocking rates and herd composition shift with rainfall and forage availability. Historically, the ranch ran up to 400 head, but in recent years he's chosen to maintain fewer than 200 cows to protect the land during frequent droughts. When conditions allow, he retains ownership of his calves as stockers to make use of surplus forage, creating a flexible, resilient model that balances profit with ecological health.

“**You can't compare yourself to other ranchers. Just do the best you can with the resources and knowledge you've got — and try to do a little better this year than you did last year. That's what sustainability really means.**” — Mike Williams

Regenerative Journey:

When Williams took over the lease nearly a decade ago, the ranch had been neglected for more than 20 years. Fences were down, springs were degraded and cattle were escaping onto nearby roads. He began with the basics — rebuilding perimeter fences, developing water sources and installing solar wells and pipelines to improve grazing distribution.

Water has been the foundation of his restoration efforts. By developing springs and installing solar-powered pumps, Williams turned muddy, underused areas into productive grazing zones. “Before, a spring might water ten cows for a few days. Now I can run the whole herd there for weeks,” he explains.

His grazing management blends adaptive grazing and virtual fencing to mimic the natural movement of wild herds. Using virtual fence technology, he keeps cattle grouped and moving across 12,000 acres of mountainous rangeland — reducing overgrazing, improving plant diversity and allowing rest periods for recovery. Over time, he's seen a decline in cheatgrass and an increase in perennial and bunchgrasses that hold soil and moisture longer.

Williams' philosophy evolved through experience, rather than inheritance. A first-generation rancher, he built his career from the ground up — starting as a horse trainer and ranch hand before leasing land of his own. “From the time I was five, I knew I wanted to be a rancher,” he says. “People told me it wasn't possible unless I inherited it, but I figured if I didn't try, I'd never know.”

Today, he balances ranch management with leadership as chairman of the U.S. Roundtable for Sustainable Beef, helping guide national conversations on environmental and economic responsibility in the beef industry.



Stewardship & Ranch Management Philosophy:

- **Stay adaptable:** Keeps cow numbers low and adjusts stockers based on rainfall and forage conditions to avoid overgrazing.
- **Water is life:** Prioritizes natural spring development, solar wells and strategic water placement to support even grazing and healthy vegetation.
- **Technology as a tool:** Employs virtual fencing to manage large landscapes efficiently as a one-man operation.
- **Progress over perfection:** Focuses on one major improvement each year—whether fencing, water systems or handling facilities — without being overwhelmed by what remains undone.
- **Community-minded leadership:** Encourages other ranchers to see sustainability not as a threat, but as a shared goal for long-term success.



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Mike Williams.