

Ranching Services: A Challenge to Rangemen

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THE West has long had easy leadership in the livestock production field. But such a condition appears about to change if the following four important trends continue.

1. A well balanced livestock-pasture-farming economy is building up in the South and Middlewest. Need of soil revitalization resulting in comparatively rapid adjustments in land use is bringing about the picturesque and economic change. Investments in fertilizer, seed, and fencing in these high rainfall regions will produce 300 to 600 pounds of beef per acre, as against 10 to 40 pounds per acre on most western native ranges.

2. A major shift of national population toward the West has been apparent during the last decade. Relocation of industrial and technical plants away from over-crowded centers of the East, together with promising new industries, holds forth a bright picture for western development, where water and raw materials hold key influence.

3. Our western ranges, while possessing tremendous potential productive capacity, have seriously declined during the past half-century. Only the phenomenal improvement in breeds and more intensive feeding methods stemming from the hundreds of thousands of cultivated acres producing feeds have offset and actually drawn attention away from this decline in range condition.

4. The paradoxical result is that of ranchers paying competitively higher and higher prices per acre on a more populous market, while each range acre continues to decline in productive earnings. Five hundred dollars per animal

unit is not an uncommon investment in land, with the average running around two to three hundred.

Put the four above trends side by side and the result is significant. Western grasslands, as a major basic resource, must be given the spotlight in the stockmen's affairs, or be relegated to a position of ever increasing dependence on other agricultural lands. The former would mean stability for the livestock industry. The latter could lead to Federal control. But these matters are relative and are influenced by many other human factors.

The one fact remains, however, that management of ranges and the restoration of grasses of highest productivity as a science must gain the attention of stockmen's groups on an equal footing with markets and livestock management if the industry is to keep pace with other agricultural and industrial development in the West. The study and application of grass improvement and management knowledge by the individual rancher must become as much a part of his daily thoughts as his concern over market reports, or the daily care and handling of livestock. Making each part of the range produce as much palatable forage as it is capable is as important as making steers gain 350 pounds or more by fall.

We need not pause over how far we are from this goal. To state that the distance can be bridged by existing educational facilities is to admit a shallow understanding of the problem. To doubt the possibility of a practical, low-cost range plan adapted to each rancher's operations is to deny the undisputable progress of range research.

Substantial advances have been made over the past forty years in plant breeding and world-wide selection, range seeding methods, soil control, natural revegetation and grazing management, as well as the recent advent of improved agricultural chemicals.

Now let us look a little farther ahead. Supposing you, as a rancher, and the livestock organizations to which you belong, have adopted an all-out policy of range betterment as a result of your joint study of the range problem.

Existing educational facilities of each state and Federal range agency are barely sufficient to carry out a well rounded program of education from the higher levels of organization within the livestock industry. The individual ranch has a different and more pressing requirement: i.e. a tangible facility for getting the job done within the framework of a sound plan over a period of years.

It is generally accepted that there is a wide gap between technological knowledge and actual practices in range management—a gap which cannot be filled by Government range technicians. The technicians services are truly educational and they are doing an admirable job in bringing technical advice to the rancher. But the lag in actual range management remains.

RANCHING SERVICES NEEDED

A third participant is needed to achieve range management and improvement. This is readily evident from a look at other agricultural industries such as forestry, farming, marketing, etc. Where government conservation activities have been most numerous, there have sprung up private consulting and farm management services in forestry, plant breeding, feed-seed-fertilizer firms, and other custom services. Once the problems and needs were understood,

there was a demand for private services in getting the results. The same relationship is being found necessary in carrying out a well-balanced range program of development and management—a range consulting service. Fortunately, the facilities of the Government for technical advice and information are fully as available to the range consultant as to the individual rancher.

Let us briefly examine a few of the many varied services which a private Range or Ranching Service can bring to the rancher.

1. *Range Analysis and Planning*: An inventory of range resources and potentials is the first important step in any range improvement program: finding out the present range condition, analyzing causes of any deterioration, determining practical corrective and improvement measures of management, and outlining the long-range objectives; considering the need for brush control or range reseeding.

2. *Improvement Contractors*: The job of reseeding, brush or weed control, water development, irrigation development, in connection with the above "blueprint" of operations, is something which pays to have done by an expert who knows how it fits into the over-all plan of management.

3. *Range Consultants*: Competent counsel and advice to the ranchowner should always be available on a follow-through basis, and if possible, by the same persons or firm which carried out the original plan of improvement. Plans have a habit of changing, and a personal counsel on whom the rancher can always call, can be of real value.

4. *Ranch Property Management*: Non-resident owners, such as business and professional men, investment buyers, ranch estates, and corporations, need competent and experienced management.

A ranching service company can provide this managerial service by providing a trained manager. Not only can this service be rendered to the owner on a higher standard of performance than is usually obtained through the individual ranch manager, but it assures the backing of a technical organization, capable of giving the ranch a broad scope of experience usually beyond the ability of any one man, and at lower cost.

5. *Ranch Supervision:* Technical counsel incorporated into ranch supervision is a decided asset to the non-resident owner. Such service can save the owner much time and expense in travel and worry. He can rest assured that his plans for the ranch are being carried out the way he would want them, by the ranch lessee or operator.

6. *Investment Consultants:* Investors in land often need competent technical advice in the selection of ranch lands which offer an opportunity for a good return on the investment. Many times a good capital gains investment is overlooked by the prospective buyer due to lack of recognition of potential production which a trained rangeman is quick to evaluate.

PROBLEMS OF THE RANCHING SERVICE

And now a few remarks are in order to those readers of the Journal who are interested in this work as a business.

Any one of the many ranching services might be considered a business in itself. Still there is something to be said for providing all these services through one company, a complete ranching facility. Unless each range practice is integrated with the over-all plan of management, effectiveness is very often lost. For example, water development can lead to maldistribution of grazing. Control of sagebrush by chemicals, unless followed by a deliberate plan of management,

can lead to serious loss of grass and soil. Reseeding, unless the grazing plan is adjusted to it, can often result in loss of the investment in this practice.

There is a need for more firms of a purely range-management nature, offering trained technicians as well as ranch managers. The need, while real enough, is far from recognition by the average resident or non-resident rancher. It is, therefore, a field which will be necessarily slow in becoming established, because: (1) It will grow only on the merits of work established, and (2) Nature's response on the western range is slow.

The progress of such a company requires salesmanship of the highest order, plus the experience and ability to reproduce results. Most important in acquiring the confidence of the ranchowner is the intermediate contact: an impartial friend or acquaintance of both parties, who has an appreciation of the need and what is required to fill it.

To get by the first five years requires a considerable original capital. Operations can be begun on the basis of improvement contractors in an area of demanding need, in order to pass the "apprentice" stage.

One great hazard confronting the young ranching service company is unfavorable weather cycles. If the service happens to hit a few good years while starting out, it is not too difficult. If the new service hits a dry year or two at the beginning, it is out of business. If a problem is very widespread over a ranch, it is nearly always the wise course to spread the work out over several years. This allows no major change in type of grazing management, allows for improvement in methods and lowering of costs, and means less gamble with drought.

The ranching service technician can be of material help in closing the gap between new technological advances and

daily ranch operations. The experimental and scientific world is traveling faster day by day. So many ideas are coming out about new products and new methods that a person could spend most of his time keeping up with them. The consultant can serve as a screen between the rancher and the unscrupulous operator who would exploit unproven new ideas. Quite often new ideas and methods have merit and economic benefit if applied by someone trained in technical range work. Certainly the next few

years will see problems solved by technological processes which we would consider fantastic or phenomenal at present.

It is of vital importance to western rangeland maintenance and development for the American Society of Range Management to seriously consider and study the need of a sound and responsible group in the ranching services field. A basic treatment of the subject would render a real service to the western livestock industry.



MAKING MONEY ON BEEF

The cheapest way to make beef is to let the cattle do as much of the work as possible. Let them harvest a lot of the feed that goes into them, and let them spread their own manure.

That means *grass*. There are a great many good grasses, and a great many ways of using them, to make beef.

A system recommended and used at the University of Missouri for making fat 2-year-olds, starts with calves, roughs them two winters, grasses them two summers, and finishes on grain.

A. J. Dyer, research cattle feeder at the University, told me that with this method 80 percent of the gain is made from roughage and grass (60 percent just from grass), and the finishing 20 percent from about 10 bushels of corn per head, plus the supplementing concentrates.

With this system of maximum forage and grass and minimum grain it is possible to sell on a minus margin, and still make money on your steers.

In Illinois it is called "delayed feeding." In Kansas a similar system is known as "deferred feeding."

Whatever the name, it lets you use the greatest amount of cheap roughage, and the smallest amount of expensive grain. You take on the least risk, and you can decide any time whether to keep on feeding cheap roughage, or start pouring on the grain to finish them for market. A lot of smart cattle feeders follow this system year after year.

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