Putting Range Management Facts To Work

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PUTTING Range Management Facts to Work" is merely selling good management. It is the job of getting the livestock operator to use the facts. The approach to this problem should be practical, factual, and straightforward. Now, how shall we go about it?

First of all, we must put ourselves in the rancher's boots and look at range management facts from his standpoint. Because of his remote place of business, the stockman has always been an individualist, perhaps the outstanding example of a free enterprise operator. The stockman's concern has largely been with his individual situation and he has had to operate according to local conditions, relying on his resourcefulness and ingenuity for success. Historically, he has been unaccustomed to cooperative effort, and in this respect differs psychologically from perhaps any other group of Americans. Perhaps he has been too rugged and too isolated in the past. Improved transportation and communication facilities have removed him from this isolation. Modern conditions have made coordinated effort and research necessary.

The livestock man is the manufacturer who converts grass, agricultural by-products, and concentrates into meat by means of those old machines, the cow and ewe. In doing this and to cope with the problems of weather, transportation, and lack of convenience, he must be an intensely practical business man. Therefore, the practicability of the management practices we advocate must be stressed. We should show that a good rancher is a good conservationist because it pays. There is as great a difference between the business of raising beef today and yesterday as there is between the long-legged, slab-sided animals of a few generations ago and the blocky, meaty animals of today.

The livestock producer knows that better animals and increased production are the result of improved breeding methods and scientific management of his ranges and pastures, but the word research is still somewhat repulsive to him. This in part is attributable to the long-haired, dreamer type of scientist who couldn't speak the rancher's language. An old-timer giving his opinion stated, "Well, at least if they can't give us facts they always give us figures." This could apply to technicians in general. Such opinion was rather widely accepted in the not too far distant past, but fortunately these impressions are rapidly passing into oblivion.

Research data should be made more palatable to the individual operator. We must show him that good range management will not only conserve our natural resources for future generations but make him more dollars as well. An illustration of this line of approach was the "Washington Cattleman of 1950" program sponsored by the Washington Cattlemen's Association.

In this project each county cattlemen's association fully investigated and selected their top operator as a nominee for the "Washington Cattleman of 1950". A point system of judging was carefully devised, based on the use of the land, the convenience and efficiency of the operation, herd management, the operator's business ability, and his citizenship.

Proper land use was given the greatest number of points. This program was a cooperative one between the Washington Cattlemen's Association, the Soil Conservation Service, the Forest Service, the State College, and the state land-management agencies. The joint committee charged with the job of selecting the man spent many days going over each nominee's operations. From this program the cattlemen received firsthand a practical demonstration in conservation and business management, and the technicians got a good lesson in the practicability phases of range and ranch management.

We must eliminate the points of irritation and emphasize the areas of understanding between the professional responsible to the public for the preservation of our natural resources and the stockman who converts these resources into something necessary to humans. After all, both groups want grass—lots of grass on the ranges every year—with erosion reduced to a minimum. Both groups want practical range management put into effect and carefully adhered to. We have enough knowledge to make sustained abundance possible but we still have need for more research to reduce costs of production so that more people may enjoy the fruits of abundance. Above all, we must translate scientific knowledge into workable technology.

Economic activities have become so complex and the problems so many that some central agency for the accumulation of facts is a necessity. The Range Society along with other agencies can do a wonderful service in this regard. However, in disseminating range management facts we must appreciate that their acceptance or refusal by one group of livestock men will have a bearing on the response of others.

Well, what are these facts that we have to sell, and how are we going to do it? Let's take a few examples.

First, consider the overcropping of much of the land in the West to grain. We can't and shouldn't say, "You fellows are ruining the heritage of future generations." But we can by facts and figures, show that a rotation of grass and legumes with grain not only will mean a greater permanent income for the rancher but will reduce erosion and thus increase the value of the property. The Soil Conservation Service has demonstrated that such rotation will raise the organic content of the soil from a low of 2.9 to 4.2 percent. The State College of Washington has shown that sweet clover-brome seeding on wheat land will produce 235 pounds of beef to the acre per year. Translate this into $.25 feeder cattle and it means a gross return to the owner of $58.75 per acre. These are facts that an operator will grasp and appreciate.

Pressures are terrific for our dry land ranges. More people need more meat, more wool, and leather. How can these constantly increasing pressures on the range land be relieved? More land converted to irrigated pastures when the water is available is one answer. This intensive type of meat production can show in dollars and cents that it pays. Irrigated pastures don't have to be sold through idealism. This is a realistic approach.

So much can be accomplished by team work. Ten years ago I was a range cattle operator. I believe I did a pretty fair job of managing the range as I did a lot of reseeding, water development, fencing for distribution, and salting away from water holes. The cost of producing a pound of beef was high. I told some of the Forest Service boys casually that the cause was due to the low carrying capacity of my private range and the forest reserve on which I had a permit. They

suggested that we make a cooperative study of the situation. The range, my cost figures, and the possible solutions of the problem were studied.

To be brief, it looked as though the production of beef on irrigated land might hold good possibilities. In a rather small way, I started some of these pastures. Time showed that our estimates were reliable, so I sold my range holdings and began this intensive method of beef production.

Results have shown that over 600 pounds of beef to the acre can be produced at a cost considerably below my former costs on dry hill range. There are many other benefits which are obvious in this type of meat production. To mention a few: lower death loss, lower labor cost, and quicker availability to the markets. This has resulted in personal gain and has reduced the pressure on the dry range. Many others can and are using this same production method.

By the way, I think the Forest Service and SCS boys in our region are a pretty fine bunch of men. Of course, they get a little starry-eyed once in a while about seas of waving grass and the primeval forest. But in the main they are intensely practical, very cooperative, and fine friends.

There is no better vehicle for fact finding and fact using than the Soil Conservation District organization. Here in one corporate entity we have the actual user of the soil and the scientist: the free enterpriser running his own show and the technician advising and otherwise helping the operator. This is practical democracy at its best. The phenomenal growth of this movement from nothing in 1937 to over 2400 districts today is proof of its popularity and worth. Of the 240 supervisors of soil conservation districts in our state, 61 are members of our cattlemen's association. Five of the seven presidents or past presidents of the cattlemen's association are or have been soil conservation district supervisors. Leaders in the cattle industry are likewise leaders in conservation.

Fortunately, the livestock producer is becoming more receptive to modern ideas and facts of better management. Yet the job of selling isn't easy. Too often the rancher may still have a congenital fear of the modern in livestock production. Too often the technician assumes a holier-than-thou attitude in talking to him. Also, there is a little too much dampness behind the ears of the younger group of professional people advocating these newer methods.

Mud slinging and name calling of "Land Grabber" or "Cattle Baron" or "Bureaucrat" or "Parasite" accomplish nothing but ill will. You can't sell anything if you are mad. We need the fine spirit of cooperation which is so evident here in the Northwest between the federal agencies, the livestock associations, and the individual ranchers. If we work as a team, we can accomplish much more good than if we work from opposite sides.

So to sum up all this, may I say that in order to put range management facts to work we must be patient, we must be practical, and we must persevere.