

# The Range and Ranch Consultant, A Needed New Profession

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**B**USINESS enterprises and the professions grow steadily more specialized, more complex and more competitive. Failure to keep step with rapidly changing developments often leads to bankruptcy. In recent years consultants have set up shop to analyze besetting problems, to advise and assist almost every kind of business and profession. Consultants in oil, mining, merchandising, legal, financial and many other fields have increased rapidly as obstacles therein multiply. Will the range livestock industry follow suit?

As one example, forest consultants listed (Society of American Foresters 1946 & 1950) increased from 44 in 1946 to 142 in 1950. Two of these firms listed up to 7 members in 1950. Specialized services offered vary from timber mapping and estimating, valuation and appraisals, protection, cost and economic studies, forest management, reforestation and on to a total of 21 categories. The growing need is recognized for advice and guidance in forestry—a field kindred to ranching.

But the demand for services of range and ranch consultants has lagged as compared to forestry and various other fields. Ranchers will, I hope, continue to be individualistic, but that attitude can be carried to extremes. Some ranchers mistakenly still feel that calling in a consultant to help find better ways to meet knotty problems would be a serious reflection on their judgment and ability. Yet they may not be abreast of all the recent advances in range management

and reseeded. Some of the most progressive and successful ranchers have been first to employ consultants, which goes to show the fallacy of the old but persistent viewpoint. Thus, it is still a challenge which must be met by tact and by honest effective services on each job performed by a consultant.

## THE NEED FOR RANGE AND RANCH CONSULTANTS

Probably no business is faced by a more varied and imposing list of obstacles than the range livestock industry. Disastrous storms, droughts, unforeseen price fluctuations, disease, insect and other pests must be countered. A multitude of physical, chemical, biological and economic factors are involved in managing ranches for profitable and stable livestock production. Success, even survival through thick and thin, depends on avoiding the many pitfalls along the way. Some of the pitfalls are partially within control of the manager, but he can, if he will, minimize effects of most of them by skillful management. •

Deteriorating soil and forage cover and subnormal production on too many ranches prove the urgent need to hasten better management by all available means. Range forage may provide up to 80 percent or more of the total feed used on the ranch. Even yet the skill needed in handling livestock too often over-shadows the emphasis needed on skill in handling the range. An experienced well qualified consultant can often be most helpful in changing wasteful or faulty management

to better practices, more suitable to specific situations. Management may account for the difference between one outfit with a 70 to 75 percent calf crop averaging well under 400 pounds at weaning, and a nearby outfit that weans an 85 percent or better calf crop averaging close to 500 pounds. Such an increase of up to 40 percent in calf production per cow unit justifies a determined effort for better management.

A consultant should supplement rather than duplicate the services of value given by bankers, county agents, or technicians from other state or federal agencies. On certain phases of a ranch operation these agencies now give invaluable service to some ranchers. But in the time available, none of them can adequately cover the whole complex field of ranch operations. A county agent commonly has 1,000 or more farm and ranch clients to service, from poultry, bees, speciality truck crops or small fruit farms to extensive sheep and cattle ranches. Time that he can spend on any one, aside from his educational, youth leadership and miscellaneous jobs, is necessarily limited. He cannot possibly follow through and adapt each new practice to every ranch in his area. On the other hand, the qualified consultant can carefully analyze each job and assist the busy operator to fit a new practice to his ranch. Agency technicians can contribute to plans and can furnish certain of the detailed help needed to activate sound plans.

Usually, there is a wide gap (Peck 1950) between the services available from public technicians and the overall plan of better management. Sometimes the rancher has the time, inclination and facts to fill this gap, but more often he is so tied down by day to day details of seasonal work that opportunities for progressive changes are lost or unduly

delayed. The consultant can help bridge this gap between new practices and their application and thus be of major assistance to all concerned in the common goal of better production and management.

#### FIELDS OF SERVICE AND QUALIFICATIONS FOR CONSULTANTS

No one ranch operator or consultant can be really expert in every branch of range and livestock husbandry. Wide experience, knowledge and study are essential to find quickly the cheapest but best solutions to the varied problems that confront a range livestock enterprise. The best analysis and advice available will often find ways to increase production or reduce costs. Growing competition from areas of increasing livestock numbers, and growing use of meat substitutes all call for closer control of the ratio of costs to returns. Recent declines in cattle prices sharply accentuate this need.

Ranch organization and finance constitute one broad field in which the essential qualifications for a range and ranch consultant are largely of an economic nature. For such work he should have sound training in economics, in financial analyses, and in cost and production relationships. He should be able to soundly recommend alternatives in operating practices, in tax and inheritance options open to the rancher. For this field he need not be experienced in ranch appraisals, unless he plans to undertake this specialized work. Many ranch appraisers are already available but few of them are fully qualified for the broader phases of range and ranch consulting service.

Another broad field of service is concerned with actual ranch operations, embracing both land and herd management problems. In this, training in economic theory becomes secondary to

qualifications of a biological nature. However a consultant in this field should clearly recognize the need for favorable cost-benefit relationships in management practices. He should be soundly trained in soil and botanical sciences, should know intimately the growth requirements and use interrelationships of forage species and range animals. He should know also how conflicts in the welfare of plants and animals can be resolved or minimized by grazing. Practical experience in methods of handling range livestock based on their habits, and in many details of range management is indispensable. Finally the consultant should have a sympathetic attitude and full respect for ranching as a dignified and essential way of life for a large sector of our people.

#### RULES OF CONDUCT

Confidence of clients and of associates is the real foundation for any profession. Ethical rules of conduct must soon be spelled out to guide practitioners of this new profession. A credo should develop in close harmony with a basic objective of Society of Range Management, i.e. "To foster advancement in the science and art of grazing land management, to promote progress in the conservation and greatest sustained use of forage and soil resources, . . ."

Consultants will be expected to follow a forthright course on controversial questions of range policy that may arise from time to time. Until rules of conduct are developed in further detail, the golden rule may be the standard. A determination to give more in terms of stable operations, than the fee charged his clients, may well be in this credo.

#### A LOOK AHEAD

A great need and some hope can be seen for a substantial growth of range

and ranch consulting, now barely started. The field is wide open. A dozen—possibly a score of hopeful souls have had the courage, or temerity, to announce as consultants. This guess indicates that the coverage for our range empire of about 728 million acres (U. S. Forest Service, 1936) is very thin at best. Even so, these few consultants have not been fully occupied. Unless more ranchers become convinced that consultants can give services worth more than the fee, the future for the profession is not very bright.

Those who stand to profit materially from such services will determine what the future will bring the profession. Every year a large number of new owners buy ranches with money from oil, mining, trade, aviation, the movies and other unrelated industries. Some of these have little or no experience or knowledge of ranch or range management. The foreman or manager may be also woefully short on qualifications needed for efficient management. A consultant often could be most helpful in safeguarding and improving the resources of such a ranch and in pointing out less expensive or more profitable methods, all without detracting from the pleasure or satisfaction of the owner. Indeed, such services may well increase satisfaction not only of the inexperienced rancher but to some old-timers who to great advantage, could make certain progressive changes in management practices. The need for and value of such services should become better recognized.

#### SUMMARY

A few qualified consultants are now able to give valuable special services in range and ranch management based on thorough analysis of the whole operation. Such service does not duplicate but rather

supplements the limited time and help that county agents or other technicians can give to any one operator. With such help many inexperienced, also some experienced managers could better safeguard range resources, increase production or reduce costs and achieve greater stability for the tough years. Such services deserve fuller use by the western livestock industry that faces a threat of sharper competition and uncertain prices.

## LITERATURE CITED

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## A STUDY OF HAIRY GRAMA (*BOUTELOUA HIRSUTA*) ON THE EXPERIMENTAL RANGE, COLLEGE STATION, TEXAS

(Abstract of thesis submitted in partial fulfillment for an M.S. degree, Texas A. and M. College, Department of Range and Forestry, 1951)

Hairy grama grows in all of the various soils and open habitats, except those subjected to periodic standing water, in the Range and Forestry Department Experimental range of 1,000 acres near College Station, Texas.

The growth and size of the hairy grama plants was influenced by the depth of the top soil to the clay-pan. Those plants growing in the deeper top soils showed more vigor and size. Forage yields, varying from 1,293 pounds to 2,632 pounds per acre were correlated with depth of top soil, and physical and chemical composition of the soil. The observed stands of hairy grama, including

the study areas, were on slopes and well drained areas.

Bisects and other root studies revealed that hairy grama only slightly penetrated the clay sub soil. Here the roots formed finely divided branchlets. Plants were observed growing in severely eroded sites, devoid of other vegetation, where its roots effectively held the soil against water erosion.

The growth of hairy grama varied greatly on hillsides, severely eroded areas, and thin top soils common to comparatively large areas. Nevertheless, this species was quite productive and aggressive. Therefore, it seems reasonable to conclude that hairy grama is ecologically well adapted to revegetate the open eroded native areas and abandoned fields of the Post Oak Belt of East Texas.

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