Ranching on Grass in Southern Idaho

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High quality beef and plenty of good grass are the rewards realized by the U-2 Cattle Company of Rogerson, for their foresight and perseverance in adapting the soils and climatic conditions of southern Idaho to the needs of their ranching operation.

Harry Noh who heads up the company is one of the top-flight grassland and livestock operators in the area. Far and wide, as well as in the Twin Falls area, his Black Angus herd is known for outstanding excellence. His grassland is winning a fine reputation.

He has reached this pinnacle through accomplishments in establishing sound management and operating practices in a 15,000 acre enterprise that embraces 9,000 acres of U-2 land and grazing rights on 6,000 acres of public land administered by the Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service. Through this progress he has developed strong leadership for many other ranchers, who are now moving ahead in improving their land, forage, and livestock resources.

These achievements have special significance because in his leadership Harry Noh reflects long-time ranching experiences and observations, first as a sheepman, then as a cattleman, and for a time he was both. Harry is the third generation in a family of livestock people who came out of Nebraska about 1909 and successively struggled with soil, water, forage and livestock problems, over which he is now scoring a triumph.

They have seen an abundance of excellent native forage, that could be found almost everywhere, shrink until there were only scatterings of poor grass. In large areas there often was only bare ground, or acres dotted with sagebrush and other worthless growth. Through long years too many head of livestock, grazing for too long periods, played havoc with the range and opened the way for widespread erosion and heavy loss of soil fertility.

U-2 Objectives

Now the U-2 Company is made up of Harry and Mrs. Noh, two sons Bill and Dick, and son-in-law Cecil Thornton. They make up an outstanding team with only one thought in mind — improve the ranch and raise better livestock.

Harry has been at the helm, and since 1950 under his program with the Twin Falls Soil Conservation District, he has been in the forefront of the drive to restore grass to top production in quality as well as quantity on private and public land, and to establish land-use and management practices that will keep it that way for those who are to follow. "It's a long and difficult task because it takes longer to build good grass back on the range than it took to tear it down," Harry has observed.

Harry typifies the stockman of the west who believes in independence and individuality, yet has a high appreciation of team work in handling common problems that beset any community or area, and of the value of professional guidance in fields where he lacks knowledge and experience.

Thus it is that he stretches credit for what is being done at U-2 until it includes more than just his three partners. For example, he includes the feed-lot operator who handles all his livestock marketings, banks that cooperate in financing his operations, Twin Falls Soil Conservation District, and the cooperating Soil Conservation Service technicians, "who showed us how to do it, then helped us get it done."

Livestock Management

Noh has worked with both sheep and cattle but finally adopted Black Angus as the principal livestock on the ranch with only a few sheep on the irrigated ranch at Rogerson.

"A big factor involved in the switch to Angus" says Harry, "was the tough herder situation when the old 'pros' died off or retired. We still like sheep, but we think cattle are wonderful ... when they are Black Angus. They appeal to us because they are gentle and easy to handle, and require no
whoop-la with a rope, when you work with them in a friendly way and cut them out on foot.”

Perhaps this is one of the reasons why a feed-lot operator, who handles all U-2 marketings, pays a premium for Noh cattle. Another factor likely is the careful attention that Harry gives to his 19 registered bulls. He keeps a closely detailed breeding record for each of these animals and for the calf crop, using a numbering system so he can trace each calf to its sire and have sound guidance in making replacements and marketings. He doesn’t sell breeding stock, but he plans to develop this line of business when his range and herd improvement programs are rounded out.

The U-2 is a cow-calf operation with calves going to market at 500 to 500 pounds in November. The operation consists of three distinct units in addition to the National Forest allotment. Calving is at Rogerson where cows and calves go out in April on native and improved spring range. They are trailed to the Big Creek ranch in June from which their allotted numbers go to the forest. The remainder are pastured on native meadow and seeded pasture. In the fall they move back to the deferred units after which calves are sold. The breeding stock then go to the Artesian ranch near Murtaugh for the winter. They are trucked to Rogerson just prior to calving.

A favorable balance between forage, feed, water and livestock has been Harry’s key to success. They plan to increase the present herd of 700 to about 1,000 head but only after feed and stock water have been developed. Harry’s motto is, “Have more feed than you need.”

**Use of Grass**

He also believes that to be profitable we have to “ranch on grass.” U-2 cattle feed on grass most of the year requiring only about 1 1/2 tons of hay. This way $30 to $40 worth of grass and hay go into a cow and calf per year and calves that bring $75 to $100 each will provide a good margin. However, if the cow and calf have to be carried on hay alone for half the year there can be little chance for profit.

Through years of experience Noh has learned to respect the needs of the land and to treat it accordingly. He has found that some lands will support more intensive use than others which need better care. Similarly, all soil will not produce everything, particularly every kind of grass or legume, because there are wide differences in the productive values of different soil types, as well as other conditions and factors. For example, tall wheatgrass does well on alkali soils of Shoshone Basin; intermediate wheatgrass is ideal for the deep bottom soils of Big Creek; and pubescent wheatgrass is used on the upland sites adjoining.

**Land Use and Improvement**

His land-use program is outstanding because it covers public as well as U-2 owned acres. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management areas, where Noh grazing rights are among the oldest on local records, are mostly surrounded by U-2 lands and are within U-2 fences. Rented acres are treated just like U-2 land and are improved as rapidly as they are reached in the work schedule, usually at the same time that U-2 acres are improved.

It’s the same way with improvement and expansion of stockwater facilities. On public land where U-2 cattle graze, 17 watering ponds have been built or improved. These and other natural water sources make it possible for U-2 Black Angus to get to water without traveling more than a half-mile, usually only a quarter-mile. Many have been developed at old seeps or spots where surface conditions indicated that water might be found. Harry has personally selected every site for these improvements and is proud of the fact that he has hit only one dry hole.

In another phase of his land improvement program, Harry is paying strict attention to expansion and improvement of fences for good range protection. Again private and public land benefit from this work. When the whole job is done, fencing will map the course of the deferred and rotational grazing schedule that he has developed. To date some 50 miles of fence have been constructed around private and federal allotted land by the U-2 Company in addition to three miles sub-division fence on the forest and about 10 miles on private land. Plans call for another 7 miles of fence to complete
Forage Improvement

In developing more and better forage Harry Noh has found that there is a lot of value remaining if native stands that look promising are given careful nursing. In this phase of his operations on public as well as U-2 land he is making surprising progress. The recovery that native grass is making, when it is protected and assisted, Harry says, is so encouraging that there will be no need for reseeding there if it can be continued in a deferred grazing status until it is safely entrenched.

In areas where reseeding is necessary he is planting improved varieties adapted to the specific soil types found there, at the rate of 200 to 300 acres annually. He has 600 acres of these 2-year old seedings ready for use in a well organized rotation-deferred grazing plan. Ranges that are in the poorest condition are kept at the top of the reseeding schedule. About 600 acres of this kind of land are being plowed at present to be seeded this fall.

While soil types are the principal guiding factor in U-2 grassland activities, rainfall and climate also received special attention before reseeding is done. Annual rainfall ranges from eight to nine inches at the lower levels and increases to 14 inches at the higher levels. He selects his varieties of grass for reseeding after consideration is given to climate, soils, rainfall and other factors, including land management practices, and ties the whole flock into one package.

In this way he has scored highly with intermediate and pubescent wheatgrass in the high meadow country, tall wheatgrass in alkali soils, and crested and Siberian wheatgrass on lower dry sites. Likewise he has learned that spring seeding is best on upper ranges, but that fall seeding produces best at lower levels. A pound of alfalfa is used in all grass seedings. Seeding of range has resulted in production that has increased 20 to 40 times over the former growth there. Grass seed for such an extensive seeding program is of considerable importance. Beginning this year seed of tall and Whitmar wheatgrass for further seeding will be produced on the Artesian ranch.

Harry Noh has set a good example in eradicating brush. He treated 60 acres with 2,4-D in 1955 and got a good kill. Already, clippings prove that forage has increased three times over the unsprayed range. Where native grass is in a promising condition he has found that brush eradication gives it added opportunity to make a come-back that will eliminate need for reseeding.

Development of grassland has been a tremendous help to the Nohs in regaining control of run-off and erosion that were wild before the grassland improvement program was launched. This control is outstanding when areas that have been managed are compared with areas that have not been established in a protective grassland cover.

Many Tours and Visitors

Importance of potency of the leadership that Harry Noh provides, through what he is successfully doing in U-2 operations, is highlighted in the number of visitors from far and wide and within the Twin Falls area who come to U-2 to see what is happening and get “how to do it” guidance. Many come as individuals, but more travel in tours like those annually made by farmers, bankers, businessmen, “vo-ag” groups, and others. Harry is never too busy to show them the works.

Most recent was the annual Grassman of the Year tour, held on the U-2 ranch on June 27, honoring Harry and the boys for winning the 1956 contest in Idaho.

The entire U-2 operation serves as an excellent demonstration in showing other ranchers what can be achieved through proper use and management of a well planned range program.