Using Terms: Management-intensive Grazing or Management Intensive Grazing

Jim Gerrish and Paul D. Ohlenbusch

Terminology, and words in general, are getting more and more meaningless every day. Grass, the plant we claim to manage, has other meanings today along with weed, marijane, and marijuana. Many other words have changed in a similar manner. As words take on new meanings, the ability to communicate is reduced. As an example, is it: Management-intensive Grazing (MiG) or Management Intensive Grazing (MiG)? Let's take a look at what's happened with these terms.

The original term, Management-intensive Grazing (MiG), is a concept credited to Jim Gerrish (one of the authors) of the University of Missouri's Forage Systems Research Center. The original definition was a systems-based approach to grazing land utilization which emphasizes the manager's understanding of the plant-soil-animal-climate interface as the basis for management decision.

The popular users, press, and many others have changed the "term" to Management Intensive Grazing (MIG) which has become linked to rotation or cell grazing, changing the term to a practice. As this has happened, the message often delivered (subtly or otherwise) has become "there is only one way to solve grazing problems, MIG (i.e. rotation or cell grazing). The result is a loss of the emphasis on managing the plant-soil-animal-climate interface.

A production system can't be managed effectively without a basic understanding of how the components of the system interact with one another (gained through research and experience) and how management decisions and climatic factors interact to affect soil-plant-animal interactions in production agriculture.

Bridging the information interface between the technical world and the practical production world needs to include a strong communication link. It needs to transfer technical information that can be understood by the producer, adapted to their situation, and result in attaining the goals of the operation. The terminology used must be consistent and understood by all parties involved. When communication fails, people may interpret what information they have (right, wrong, or indifferent) and proceed. Or they may ignore the information and continue what they are doing. In today's readily accessible information climate and with the desire to be more profitable, the former is most likely to occur. The need for terminology that establishes consistent and understandable communication from the technical world to the producer world is extremely important. The more the terms we use are consistent between the technical and practical user, the better the communication bridge works. How Important Is Terminology?

Using our example, the key point of Management-intensive Grazing (MiG) as a concept is the use of the term management-intensive. Most people have forgotten the all important hyphen between management and intensive. One should practice management-intensive any kind of production, be it broccoli production or goat breeding.

A production system can't be managed effectively without a basic understanding of how the components of the system interact with one another (gained through research and experience) and how management decisions and climatic factors interact to affect soil-plant-animal interactions in production agriculture. Emphasis must be placed on the word "management" when speaking of MiG to make clear that it is the management aspect of the system which is being intensified, not the grazing.

To understand the management-intensive concept, four key points must be included:

* There must be a goal driven approach to production management.
* The production goals should take the form of economic return per acre or per animal rather than arbitrary measurements of output.
* Another desirable goal is to actually enhance the resource base (land, labor, capital, and management) rather than simply conserving it.

A final goal of the production system should be to provide a comfortable quality of life for the operator and family.

None of the above points mention any management practice. Goals are the key point. All require decision making toward meeting the goals that define the future of the land, labor, capital, and management resources, the future economic status of the operation, and the future quality of life for the operator and immediate family. Other goals may include community benefits and environmental issues (these are indirectly related to the production).

The definition and key points of MiG imply the use of business management principles of inventory and evaluate resources, develop long-term goals and plans, develop annual production plans to meet long term goals, and then implement the annual plans with adjustments. This style of

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management relies heavily on records. Added to this is a social goal: the family defining their future in terms of what they need and want.

This combination of business and social goals moves the decision process to a new level for those advising land owners and operators. It means that we must work with people as we find them (their abilities, resources, goals, and aspirations), not where we want (or think) they should be. This is a tough change in attitude for many advisors. We are the "experts" who are supposed to have the "all the answers" to people's problems. In reality, what we (the advisor) might do ourselves does not reflect the abilities, resources, goals, and aspirations of the people we are advising.

Experience in working with people leads one to understand that when a person has ownership of a reasonable idea or goal, it has a very high probability of SUCCESS. If they are coerced or forced into a decision, there is a very high probability of FAILURE.

Making the land better for the next generation has been the goal of many generations of farmers and ranchers over the centuries. In modern agriculture, that objective has sometimes fallen by the wayside in the struggle to simply survive. One of the reasons many young people have forsaken coming back to the farm is the view that farm life is one day of drudgery followed by another. Farming and ranching needn't be that way and a final goal of the production system should be to provide a comfortable quality of life. To be successful, it is more important to work smarter than to just work harder.

Sound grazing management is built around four key factors: 1) meeting the nutrient needs of whatever class or classes of livestock is involved; 2) optimizing of forage yield, quality, and persistence; 3) protecting and enhancing all resource bases; and 4) integrating knowledge and appropriate technology to develop a practical and economically viable management system. All of these factors are closely interrelated and should only be considered from a total systems approach.

Flexibility is the key to management: planning, records, evaluating records, planning, planning, planning! No one ever plans to fail. But a lot of people fail to plan!

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Authors are Research Assistant Professor, Forage Systems Research Center, University of Missouri Columbia, Mo., and Extension Specialist, Range and Pasture Management, Kansas State University, Ks, respectively.