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IN THIS ISSUE:

Important Role of Grazing Management Emphasized at 4NCGL

By: Kindra Gordon

Grazing enthusiasts from across the country joined together for the Fourth National Conference on Grazing Lands (4NCGL) held Dec. 13-16 at the Nugget Casino Resort in Reno-Sparks, Nev. The event attracted nearly 700 registered attendees, 30 exhibitors and 45 poster presentations. A line-up of over 100 speakers – many of them ranchers – emphasized the important role of grazing management in helping sustain healthy landscapes, produce productive livestock, and provide wildlife habitat, clean water and open space.

During the opening keynote address, Natural Resource Conservation Service Chief David White retold the story of how Hugh Hammond Bennett showed his dedication to the land as he led the soil conservation movement in the 1920s and 1930 – and eventually convinced the nation to establish the Soil Conservation Service (now NRCS). White reminded those in attendance that the basic tenant behind the establishment of the federal conservation agency is still relevant today, "How we treat the land will impact our long-term sustainability."

Nevada Department of Conservation and Natural Resources director Allen Biaggi also addressed conference attendees and encouraged ranchers and land owners to make a continual effort to tell the public about how they care for their land and livestock. "We need to tell that story," he said and suggested that today's social media tools such as blogs, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube can be useful in sharing the stewardship effort.

During the conference, several rancher speakers discussed the importance of holistic management and new thinking to their operations. Greg Judy, a rancher and author from Missouri, discussed how he has evolved from management intensive grazing to using high stock density grazing over the last several years. As a result of the change, Judy says he is now only feeding hay about 8 days during the winter, has increased the carrying capacity on his land, and has improved his quality of life. Judy said, "I think with this type of grazing management [high stock density] I've never been more excited about our future or any farm's future. It has increased our diversity, and we are now sustainable."

Colorado rancher Kit Pharo also spoke to a standing-room only crowd and emphasized the need for ranchers and land managers to embrace change in the future. Pharo shared that he believes the livestock industry is at a "tipping point," saying, "What may have worked

(continued on page 2)

Grazing Management

(continued from page 1)

well for the last twenty years is not going to work for the next twenty years." Rather, Pharo emphasized the need for new thinking and low input operations to increase sustainability and profitability within the industry. He said, "Only 10-15% of cow-calf producers are making money every year. We need to change that."

Sherry Vinton, a rancher from Whitman, Neb., was among the speakers along with her daughter Jessica – who represents the 6th generation on the family operation in the Nebraska Sandhills. The duo shared how management, rotational grazing, industry involvement, a strong work ethic, and adapting to new technology have been important to their ranch's long-term viability. Vinton also praised the value and need for efforts like the Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI). She said, "Basic research, education and technical assistance are like a little black dress – they never go out of style."

On Wednesday, Dec. 16, the 4NCGL Closing Session concluded with remarks from the University of Wyoming's John Tanaka, who is chair of the Sustainable Rangelands Roundtable, North Dakota State University's Don Kirby, who is president of the Society for Range Management, and Rob Roudebush, division director of the Bureau of Land Management.

A trade show and technical poster presentations were also part of the three-day conference, which attracted participants from coast to coast. Proceedings from the event's speakers will be compiled on a CD and mailed to all registered attendees in March or April 2010. Land grant universities, the National Agriculture Library and key members of Congress who support GLCI will also receive copies of the proceedings. Additional copies of the proceedings on CD will be available for a nominal fee by contacting Monti Golla at grazinglands@verizon.net. For more about GLCI visit www.glci.org.

UPCOMING GRAZING EVENTS

Jan. 20-21 – Heart of America Grazing Conference, Roberts Centre, Wilmington, OH. Speakers include Justin Sexten, University of Missouri Extension beef specialist, on eight steps to stretching your pasture. And, Michigan grazier Howard Straub will share the economics of his grazing operation; Ben Bartlett will follow up with remarks on low-stress livestock handling. Breakout sessions will feature producer presentations focusing on beef, sheep and goat, dairy and advanced grazing management. In addition, Ohio State University specialists Steve Loerch and Dave Barker will discuss forage and grazing management. For more info, go to forages.osu.edu

Jan. 22-23 - 14th annual Vermont Grazing and Livestock Conference, Lake Morey Resort, Fairlee, VT. Keynote speaker Brian Moyer of Rural Vermont. Preconference workshops on business planning, winter animal management and weed control with Kathy Voth. Over 30 workshops on sustainable livestock production, with topics such as pasture-based research, grazing season extension, soil fertility & productivity, local beef marketing, high quality hay production, transitioning dairy farms to rotational grazing, small ruminant parasite management, swine, poultry and more. For more information, visit www.uvm.edu/pasture

Jan. 27-30 – Cattle Industry Annual Convention and Trade Show, San Antonio, TX. See www.beef.org for information.

Jan. 29-30 – Second Annual Winter Green-up Grass-fed Conference, Latham, NY. Speakers will include Allen Williams, Terry Gompert, Troy Bishopp, Mark DeBoo and Ken Jaffee. For information visit www.diamonddangus.com.

Feb. 2 – Animal Grazing Behavior workshop, featuring Fred Provenza, Lusk, WY. For more information call Niobrara Conservation District 307-334-2953 or e-mail lshaw@wyoming.com.

Feb. 8-11 – 63rd Annual Society for Range Management Meeting, Denver, CO. Meeting will be co-hosted with the Weed Science Society of America. Joint conference symposia will focus on topics that impact the nation's "working landscapes" used to raise crops and livestock - from biocontrol agents and weed physiology to GPS technology for the precision application of herbicides, as well as management of open spaces in both urban and suburban environments.

An **Open Space Grasslands Symposium** will be held in conjunction with the SRM meeting on February 11 @ Sheraton Denver Hotel from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm. For more information go to http://www.rangelands.org/denver2010/program_symposia_openspaces.shtml. This day-long symposium will focus on the application of science to management for open space grasslands.

For further information or to register, visit www.wssa.net or www.rangelands.org.

Feb. 19-20 – 18th Annual Wisconsin Grazing Conference sponsored by GrassWorks, Inc. at Hotel Mead, Wisconsin Rapids, WI. For information visit http://www.grassworks.org/Conference%20Page.htm

Helping Producers:

Nebraska Offers Rangeland Monitoring Program

The Nebraska Grazing Lands Coalition (NGLC) has seen a demand across the state to help producers measure the health of their grasslands since the launch of it's Rangeland Monitoring Program in early 2009.

Funded by the Nebraska Environmental Trust and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service of Nebraska, the NGLC Rangeland Monitoring Program provides assistance to landowners and managers in identifying grazing management goals and implementing a monitoring system to measure change.

"Producers are finding that rangeland monitoring is a requirement of most government compensation programs for land," says Marcy Hunter, NGLC Coordinator. The Natural Resources Conservation Service rolled out their Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) this fall, which provides compensation to eligible producers to conserve and enhance soil, water, air, and related natural resources on their land. Rangeland monitoring is one of the requirements of that program and can be done using the techniques taught by the NGLC Range Technicians through the Rangeland Monitoring Program.

Todd Eggerling, a producer from Martell, Nebraska participated in the NGLC Monitoring program. He states, "I had a great time learning the methods of range monitoring. The data generated will help me with decisions that keep my operation in good working order, before any long term damage."

The goal of the Rangeland Monitoring Program is to have 100 producers signed up for the first year. It is available on a first-come, first-serve basis and is filling up fast with nearly 60 producers currently participating. For more information, contact NGLC Coordinator Marcy Hunter at marcy@nebraskagrazinglands.org or 402.465.4304.

10 REMINDERS FOR A PROFITABLE FORAGE PROGRAM

With forage often accounting for more than half the production costs – and most of the nutrition – of forage-consuming animals, it has a major impact on both expenses and income. Writing in the *Ohio Beef Cattle Letter*, Auburn's Don Ball, Georgia's Carl Hoveland, and Kentucky's Garry Lacefield offer these 10 reminders for a profitable forage program.

1. **Know forage options and animal nutritional needs.** Forages vary as to adaptation, growth, distribution, quality, yield, persistence and potential uses. Also, various types and classes of animals have different nutritional needs. Good planting decisions require knowing forage options for the land resources and nutritional needs of the animals.
2. **Establishment is critical.** Good forage production requires an adequate stand of plants. Mistakes during establishment often have long-term consequences. Use of high-quality seed of proven varieties, timely planting and attention to detail lead to establishment success.
3. **Soil test, then lime and fertilize as needed.** This practice, more than any other, affects the level and economic efficiency of forage production. Fertilizing and liming as needed help ensure good yields, improve forage quality, lengthen stand life and reduce weed problems.
4. **Use legumes when feasible.** Legumes offer important advantages including improved forage quality and biological nitrogen fixation, whether grown alone or with grasses. Every producer should regularly consider on a field-by-field basis whether the introduction or enhancement of legumes would be beneficial and feasible. Once legumes have been established, proper management optimizes benefits.
5. **Emphasize forage quality.** High animal gains, milk production, and reproductive efficiency require adequate nutrition. Producing high-quality forage requires knowing the factors that affect forage quality and managing accordingly. Matching forage quality to animal nutritional needs greatly increases efficiency.
6. **Prevent or minimize pests and plant-related disorders.** Diseases, insects, nematodes and weeds lower yields, reduce forage quality and stand persistence, and/or steal water, nutrients, light and space from forage plants. Variety selection, cultural practices, scouting, use of pesticides and other management techniques can minimize pest problems. Knowledge of potential animal disorders caused by plants can reduce or avoid losses.
7. **Strive to improve pasture utilization.** The quantity and quality of pasture growth vary over time. Periodic adjustments in stocking rate or use of cross fencing to vary the type or amount of available forage can greatly affect animal performance and pasture species composition.
8. **Minimize stored feed requirements.** Stored feed is one of animal production's biggest expenses, so lowering requirements reduces costs. Extending the grazing season with use of both cool-season and-warm season forages, stockpiling forage and grazing crop residues can reduce stored-feed needs.
9. **Reduce storage and feeding losses.** Wasting hay, silage or other stored feed is costly. On many farms the average storage loss for round bales of hay stored outside exceeds 30%, and feeding losses can easily be as high or higher. Minimizing waste with good management, forage testing and ration formulation enhances feeding efficiency, animal performance and profits.
10. **Results require investments.** Results are usually highly correlated with investments in terms of planning, effort and dollars. In particular, the best and most profitable forage programs have had the most thought put into them. Top producers strive to continue to improve their operations.

Feeding Method Affects Hay Consumption, Losses

Results from a study in Scott County, AR, show that choosing the right hay feeding method can go a long way in helping a livestock producer reduce feed losses.

The study compared three different methods of feeding hay: unrolled, unprotected and shredded hay fed in tires. About 47 fall calving cows weighing about 1,250 lbs each were exposed to an allotment of hay for 24 hours. On average, cattle in the study consumed 61% of unrolled hay, 51% of unprotected hay and nearly 100% of shredded hay fed in tires.

An advantage to feeding unrolled bales: The unrolling disperses the hay. That allows "boss" and timid cows to eat from the same bale at the same time and reduces hoof-action damage in the feeding area. On the flip side, unrolling excess amounts of hay can contribute to losses as cattle will trample, lie in, or eliminate waste onto remaining feed once they are full.

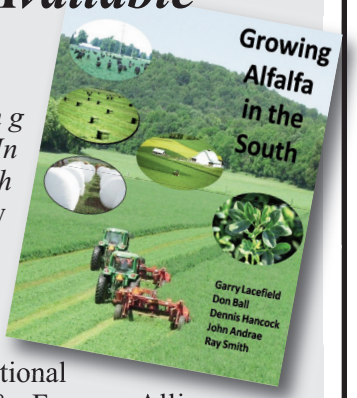
The Scott County cattle, however, were used to eating shredded hay in tires and unaccustomed to unrolled hay, which may, according to researchers, have caused its higher losses.

Shredding hay with a mixing wagon and auguring it into large tires results in nearly all the hay being eaten, but it requires an investment in large specialized equipment and can be time-consuming.

The study also showed that differences in bale feeders can influence hay losses. For unprotected bales, feed losses amounted to 40%; cradle feeders, 15%; wagon hay feeders, 11%; ring feeders, 6% and cone feeders, 4%.

The University of Arkansas Extension Web site provides more on hay storage methods and feeding losses.

Southern Alfalfa Growers Guide Available



Growing Alfalfa In The South is a new 16-page brochure, recently released by the National Alfalfa & Forage Alliance (NAFA). The publication, written by forage extension specialists from Kentucky, Georgia, South Carolina and Alabama, is available for $2 per copy plus postage at www.alfalfa.org. For a pdf version, click on the brochure's cover on that Web page.

To have your GLCI activities or upcoming events highlighted in this newsletter, contact Kindra Gordon at phone 605-722-7699 or kindras@gordonresources.com.

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