More than 400 grazing enthusiasts gathered in Orlando, FL, Dec. 9-12 for the Fifth National Conference on Grazing Lands (5NCGL). This event focuses on grazinglands and the conservation benefit they offer to America’s livestock producers, watersheds and wildlife.

Oklahoma’s U.S. Representative Frank Lucas (R) – who is also chairman of the House Agriculture Committee – presented remarks during the opening session of the conference. Lucas (pictured at left) spoke of the challenges in Congress including efforts to get the 2012 Farm Bill passed. He noted the Dust Bowl of the 30s and farm financial crisis of the 80s and said, “My goal is to make sure we have federal policy that does not create or enhance the agony like we had in those times.”

He added, “We’ve been so successful with conservation, most people don’t think that can happen again. That’s not true.”

That said, Lucas encouraged attendees to attend town meetings and other events to develop a relationship with their representatives to Congress and their staff. He concluded, “So when it matters, you can pick up the phone and call them, and you can make a difference.”

Renowned animal scientist Temple Grandin also addressed 5NCGL attendees and shared strategies for improving animal welfare. She noted that calm animals are easier to handle – and have better productivity and performance.

Grandin (pictured above) also encouraged livestock producers to be proactive in educating the public – and legislators – about the good things the industry is doing with regard to animal care and welfare. She encouraged the use of social media such as Facebook and YouTube videos to help “show” the efforts being done.

With regard to livestock grazing, she noted there is still a stereotype that cattle are detrimental to the land. Grandin said, “We’ve got to keep educating people that with management cattle can be beneficial for grazing lands and the environment.”

- By Kindra Gordon

See inside for more highlights from the conference.
Speaker presentations, a trade show, educational poster displays – and ample discussions in the hallway – were the ingredients that made for a successful 5th National Conference on Grazing Lands held Dec. 9-12 in Orlando, FL.

“Grazing Lands...The Magical Environment” was the theme of the conference – with a nod to the Magical Kingdom in near proximity to the event. But, on a more serious note, many of the presenters and participants discussed the beneficial value properly managed grazinglands offer to the nation – in the form of productive lands for raising livestock, providing habitat for wildlife and the boost to soil health and water infiltration in watersheds.

Among the presenters were Colorado rancher Kit Pharo, who shared his philosophy on profitable livestock production; noted animal behaviorist Fred Provenza, who shared thoughts on nutritional wisdom among livestock – and humans; and numerous producers from around the country who raise everything from beef and dairy cattle to sheep, goats and horses.

Many attendees concurred that the true “magic” of the event was the opportunity to listen and learn from real-life producers who are stewards of the land every day.

The original artwork used for the 5NCGL conference logo was donated to GLCI and auctioned off as a fundraiser during the conference. The artwork was created by Florida’s own Sean Sexton of Vero Beach. Sexton has a dual role as an artist and a rancher, and he shared his experiences as a presenter during a concurrent session at the conference.

More than 400 attendees from across the U.S. participated in the 5th National Conference on Grazing Lands. Among them, Wade Ross (left) brought 41 producers involved with the Texas Small Farmers and Ranchers to the conference. Here, Ross visits with Greg Hendricks (right), Florida NRCS state resource conservationist, during registration.
Popular presenter Don Ball (pictured), a professor emeritus of Auburn University, joined with his colleague Garry Lacefield of the University of Kentucky to address Forage Challenges & Opportunities in today’s climate. The presenters were peppered with a variety of questions from the audience. Lacefield also addressed conference attendees during a luncheon program with a moving personal perspective on Gratitude & Patriotism. Lacefield reminded participants to remember to be grateful for farmers, food, family, friends, faith and freedom.

Soil health was a reoccurring topic by presenters at 5NCGL. Lyle Perman of Lowry, SD, (pictured) operates Rock Hills Ranch with his wife Garnet and son and daughter-in-law. Using some “cowboy math” (see photo), Perman shared how he sees his responsibility as a landowner to manage one billion gallons of water. Perman noted that with good grazing management and maintaining vegetative cover, water infiltration can be greatly enhanced and runoff reduced considerably. Another presenter, Gene Goven, a rancher from Turtle Lake, ND, shared that his philosophy for grazing management is that “every raindrop should infiltrate where it falls.” Goven also noted that with his land management practices over the decades he has increased the wildlife on his land five fold.

A popular booth in the trade show area featured the Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship (DGA) program that is currently underway in Wisconsin. The program is the first of its kind in the nation to offer a fully legalized apprenticeship for dairy apprentices. Currently, 9 individuals are enrolled in the two-year training. Program Director Joe Tomandl says the primary objective of the apprenticeship program is to facilitate the pathway to farm ownership (or generational transfer) for individuals interested in dairy farming and to keep more land in grass for dairies. DGA was developed by GrassWorks, Inc. in collaboration with the Bureau of Apprenticeship Standards, Department of Workforce Development and with support from USDA’s National Institute of Food and Agriculture’s Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program. For more info visit www.dairygrazingapprenticeship.org.
The 23rd annual Environmental Stewardship Award Program (ESAP) has officially opened its nomination season for 2013. Established in 1991 by the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association (NCBA), the program has recognized the outstanding stewardship practices and conservation achievements of U.S. cattle producers for more than two decades. Seven regional winners and one national winner are selected annually by a committee of representatives from universities, conservation organizations, and federal and state agencies.

Any individual, group or organization is eligible to nominate one individual or business who raises or feeds cattle. Applications for the 2013 ESAP award are due Mar. 1, 2013. For more information, visit www.environmentalstewardship.org.

WORTH CHECKING INTO ONLINE:

• “So God Made A Farmer” tribute read by Paul Harvey at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=atts61OrFg
• Purple Heart Ranch - a ranch with a higher purpose; http://www.militarywarriors.org/skills4life
• Second Annual National Native Seed Conference, Santa Fe, NM, April 9-12; www.nativeseed.info

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