Resource Roundup

California Ranchers Named Top Stewards

Elaine and George Work, owners of Work Family Ranch of San Miguel, Calif., were named the national winners of the 2004 Environmental Stewardship Award Program (ESAP) by the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) during a reception Jan. 29 at the 2004 Cattle Industry Annual Convention and Trade Show in Phoenix, Ariz.

Sponsored by Dow AgroSciences, the Environmental Stewardship Award Program recognizes cattle producers whose stewardship practices are inventive, cost-effective and contribute to environmental conservation. The recipients of this top U.S. beef industry environmental award are selected by a committee of representatives from university faculty, federal and state government agencies, and conservation and environmental organizations.

The Work Family Ranch is a combination cow-calf and stocker operation. It is family-owned and well on its way to being operated by the fifth generation. The ranch features guided hunts, a Farmstay program, public trail rides, and a girls' horse camp.

The ranch, which was originally homesteaded in the late 1890s, is located in Monterey and San Luis Obispo counties. It consists of 12,000 owned acres, with 9,000 acres for grazing on native and non-native perennial grasses, 1,000 acres for dryland farming, 1,000 acres enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and 1,000 acres rotated between pasture and crops. The ranch is considered a year-round grazing operation with no supplementation to their 200 head of mother cows and 200 head of stockers.

Other regional winners recognized by NCBA's annual environmental stewardship program included Carlton 2 x 4 Ranch, Arcadia, FL; M&M Cattle Co., Carthage, MO; Canyon View Farms, Geary, OK; Frasier Farms, Limon, CO; and Barenthsen Red Angus Ranch, Powers Lake, ND.

GPS Offers Grazing Insight

Most long-time ranchers think they know their cattle pretty well – right down to their favorite grazing spots. But the newest technology – Global Positioning Systems (GPS) – is offering helpful insight into the world of livestock grazing. Texas A&M Extension range specialist Robert Lyons is using this technology on three ranches to help determine where animals are, and are not, grazing.

On each of the three ranches, four to six animals among a herd of about 50 were collared with GPS collars and their location points were plotted with GPS every five minutes, 24 hours a day during the study periods. Results revealed that animals often avoided particular areas within the pasture – sometimes the areas were too far from water, too heavily covered with brush, too steeply sloped or too rocky.

"Grazing distribution was uneven in all of the ranches studied," Lyons reports. While many would expect this to be so, with the GPS data points of the animals plotted on a map, landowners can see exactly which areas are being used and those being avoided.

Lyons says that is powerful information. "With that knowledge, landowners can eliminate some of these problem areas with management. In some situations they can adapt to the challenge and perhaps save those areas for wildlife or recreation."

Lyons reports that individual GPS collars cost about $4,500, but he says they are a worthwhile research tool that will provide valuable grazing management applications in the years to come.

Sharing Ideas

For producers with grazing management questions, North Dakota and Nebraska have both taken a unique approach to help share ideas. Grazing coalitions in each state have set up a mentoring network to help offer information, ideas, and insight to interested producers and agency personnel.

The mentoring group consists of experienced grazing land managers across the state who have agreed to provide guidance and counsel based on knowledge and experience they've gained in their business and interaction with other ranchers across the country. The coalitions in each respective state have developed a brochure with a list and contact information for the mentors who can be contacted, as well as noted those individuals particular area of

expertise. To learn more, contact North Dakota's Todd Hagel at todd.hagel@nd.usda.gov or Nebraska's Roger Chesley at rchesley@gpcom.net.

Order Your Proceedings From GLCI

The latest research, technologies and management ideas for grazing programs were presented at the Second National Conference on Grazing Lands held in Nashville, Dec. 7-10, 2003. Sponsored by the Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI) and its industry partners including SRM, the event included 175 speakers on topics including wildlife livestock interactions, grazing and endangered species, grazing management on small acreages and much more. If you were unable to attend the Second National Grazing Conference, proceedings will be available highlighting each of the presentations. To request a copy, contact Monti Golla, administrator of the GLCI at 979-268-0980, or by e-mail at grazinglands@cox-internet.com.

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