



PLANNING GUIDE

NO. 1

Rangeland Watershed Program

U.C. Cooperative Extension and USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Identifying Your Goals

What are you trying to achieve through your use of time, effort, money, and management skills? Where are you going, how are you going to get there, and when will you arrive at your intended destination? The answers to these questions, and the nature of your intentions for the future, can be found in your choice of goals. Since management is a goal-directed activity (an activity directed toward goal attainment), your goals provide direction to all your management efforts.

Goals are a very personal aspect of life. While your goals may be similar to those identified by others, they will be unique to you (your family). They will reflect your values and beliefs, the resources you have to work with, and the opportunities and limitations that you face. Through their goals, each person, family, or business unit identifies its aspirations for the future.

If goals really are this personal, you may wonder why we start a discussion of ranch management by focusing on goals and priorities. We do so because individuals and families seem much more likely to achieve the things they want in life if they know what they are trying to accomplish, how they want to carry out their actions or decisions, and when their efforts are to be completed.

Goal Identification Considerations

All of us have goals that we work toward over many years—goals such as the debt-free ownership of a farm or ranch or “burning” the mortgage on the family home. Some goals will require a lifetime to achieve. Others can be attained in a year, a few years, or a decade. Goals that will be achieved over many years are called long-term goals. Those that can be attained in relatively short periods of time are usually called short-term goals

or objectives. In farming/ranching, short-term goals focus on hoped-for achievements or production targets such as renting additional pasture for this year or increasing stocker average daily gains by 10 percent.

To the extent possible, one seeks to have short-term goals that directly support attainment of long-term goals. When this is true, the stage is set for more effective financial and business management. But, it's rare for all short-term and long-term goals to be mutually supporting. Production goals for farming/ ranching may be somewhat in opposition to important short-term quality of life goals. If you find inconsistencies in your set goals, don't be surprised. Priority setting provides a means of examining conflict or competition between goals and identifying the ones that you believe are most important or most urgent.

Goal Writing Guidelines

Here are some ideas about writing goal statements that can serve as guidelines as you complete the goal setting exercise:

- < Goals are written action statements. “To complete...” or “To earn...” or other action statement introduces a typical goal.
- < Long-term goals usually specify the time by which the goal is to be attained. “To pay off the real estate mortgage by...”
- < When long-term goals do not specify a time, they usually refer to qualitative aspects of life.

“ To make it possible for each of our children to secure a college or university degree by providing...”

- < Long-term goals should be believable in that they should describe situations or conditions that you think you can achieve over the years. Avoid “pie-in-the-sky” long-term goals that you neither believe in nor will find possible to achieve.
- < Short-term goals indicate the time by which the goal is to be attained. “To replace our present tractor with a 125 horsepower model by the end of 1999.”
- < Short-term goals should be attainable in that they should describe situations that you believe are possible to achieve in the designated time. Avoid “impossible” short-term goals that you know cannot be attained, as they cause great discouragement.

As you write goal statements you are expressing your hopes and dreams and ambitions for the future by identifying what you want to achieve, how you intend to achieve, and when you intend to achieve each desired outcome.

The following worksheets will help you develop three kinds of long- and short-term goals: production, quality of life, and natural resource goals. You will want to review and update these goals throughout the planning process and at least annually thereafter.