Spring 2013

Placer County
11477 E. Avenue
(Bldg 306, DeWitt Center)
Auburn, CA 95603
530-889-7385
FAX 530-889-7397
Email: ceplacer@ucdavis.edu
Hours: Monday - Friday
8 - 12   12:30 - 4:30

Nevada County
255 So. Auburn Street
(Veterans Memorial Bldg)
Grass Valley, CA 95945
530-273-4563
FAX 530-273-4769
Email: cenevada@ucdavis.edu
Days: Tuesday & Thursday
8 - 12 12:30 - 4:30

California Grazing Academy
April 26-27, 2013
UC Sierra Research and Extension Center Browns Valley, CA

Fees and Enrollment:
$160.00 (includes meals, and course materials - some lodging available)

Limited sleeping space available — first come, first served (bring your own sleeping bag and towel).
No walk-in registrations due to set-up needed for hands-on activities. Registration is available online at http://ucanr.org/sites/Roger_Livestock/?calitem=177121&g=29082, or complete the attached registration form.

NO REFUNDS.
Your check guarantees your space.

About The California Grazing Academy
The California Grazing Academy is a unique and exciting program emphasizing practical application of controlled grazing principles to improve the environment and increase ranch profit. This challenging course consists of a minimum of lecture and a maximum of hands-on experience.

After completing the Academy, course participants will be able to:

- Assess the condition of the four basic ecological processes that determine ranch productivity.
- Apply principles of time and stock density to improve pasture productivity and stock performance.
- Estimate carrying capacity.
- Apply principles of animal behavior to reduce stress.
- Determine the supplementation needs of grazing animals.
- Design a layout to efficiently use resources and apply controlled grazing principles.
- Immediately improve grazing management on your own ranch.
- Understand underlying principles of using high stock densities.
- Managing through drought.

For More Information
Contact Roger Ingram at the UC Cooperative Extension Office/Placer County, located at 11477 E Avenue, Auburn, CA 95603, call (530) 889-7385, or email at rinking@ucanr.edu
**KEEP AN EYE OUT ON DROUGHT**

*Roger Ingram*

*County Director and Farm Advisor, Placer/Nevada Counties*

Below is a table that compares the 1962-2011 average rainfall at the Sierra Research and Extension Center (SFREC) with the 2011-12 and 2012-13 rainfall years to date.

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I had hoped to make it through a year of Foothill Rancher without having to write a drought article. If you look at the tables above, SFREC was 5.40 inches ABOVE the 1962-2011 average as of December 31, 2012. Over the next 56 days (I am writing this article on February 25), there has only been 0.97 inches of rain. By the end of January, SFREC was still 0.36 inches above normal on precipitation. By February 25th, SFEC was now -3.79 inches of normal. If SFREC gets normal precipitation in March and April, of 6.37 inches, we could come close to normal forage production for the year. Last year, SFREC received 12.87 inches in March and April. I do not think I would count on that happening again.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) three-month outlook on precipitation shows below normal rainfall for this area for the period of March - May 2013. You can view maps at the National Weather Service's Climate Prediction Center website:

http://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/index.php

Most of the west is staring down both barrels of continued drought. If you don't have a drought plan, sit down now and make one. It may be too late to do some of the steps that could have drought proofed your business for the current situation (create an enterprise mix compatible with drought risk, develop long term water storage, shift to a healthier successional state, etc.). But there are still important actions to take to manage through drought. They include:

10. Identify the critical rain date. That's the earliest date you know it will be a poor grass year. That's the date your drought response gets implemented. Let everyone know what the date is and what will happen when it comes.

9. Destock. The oldest and one of the most important rules in the book: fluctuate the stocking rate (grass demand) to match the carrying capacity (grass supply). If you don't have the grass you better not have the beasts. Don't wait until you are down to the last blade of grass to make destocking decisions. The dust and heat of the sorting gate is no place to formulate strategic plans or think through the economic and financial consequences of your decisions. Discuss and develop the policy now, and put it in writing.

At a recent Executive Link meeting Bud Williams (now deceased) reminded us that ranchers have three things in their inventory: money, grass and
livestock. He said you’ll never go broke having too much money or too much grass, but you can sure have too many cattle. Being caught with cattle on hand once everyone else has started selling leads to poor prices and overstocked ranches. The sooner you react, the better the prices and the more feed you’ll have left.

8. Re-do Your Stock Flow & Cash Flow Plans. Since destocking resulted in abnormally high sales at a time when income was not anticipated, you’ll need to re-do the stock flow and cash flow. More than any other tool, these two documents put you in control of your business. At the second Ranching for Profit School I attended I met Harold Hunt, one of Stan Parson’s early clients from northern California. Harold, a very successful grazer and businessman sat in as we began a discussion about the grazing principles. I asked Harold what he considered the key to cell grazing. He responded instantly, “managing cash flow.” Sure he had misunderstood my question, I rephrased it only to get the same answer. I tried one more time, but his response stayed the same. It was about a year later that his response finally sunk in.

7. Plan for Income & Capital Preservation. You need to have a plan to create income to meet ongoing business and living expenses while preserving the capital from drought-induced livestock sales.

6. Increase Rest Periods. Increase the rest periods because plants grow slower in drought.

5. Combine herds (assuming water delivery in cells is adequate). Combining herds will increase the number of paddocks/herd. This will keep the graze period short and increase stock density. Increasing density will generally improve the distribution of livestock and improve the uniformity of grazing.

4. Fence! A little polywire to split paddocks will help keep graze periods short, stock density high. We all realize that the impacts of bad management are intensified in drought. But according to Australian scientist, Christine Jones, ecological communities are susceptible to both positive and negative change in drought. My experience is that the positive impacts of good management are also intensified in drought.

3. Never, Ever Drought Feed. One Ranching for Profit student put it perfectly when he said, “trying to feed your way out of drought is like trying to borrow your way out of debt.” Drought feeding leads to overstocking, deteriorated pastures and bankrupt ranchers.

2. Beware of “free” money. Subsidies to maintain stocking rates, purchase feed, and keep people going for one more year reward poor management. These policies have encouraged overstocking and desertification, economic peril and financial disaster.

1. Develop a positive attitude about drought. Drought is a normal part of ranching. In fact, there are more dry years than wet years. If the range needs rest, it may be that you need rest too.
OTHER CONSIDERATIONS OF DESTOCKING

Roger Ingram

CULLING POLICY

If you reach the decision point to destock, what is the hierarchy that you will use to cull?

Here are some suggestions:

**Wean early** - I realize this does not have anything to do with culling. Weaning early will help you dramatically reduce stocking rate as a dry cow had a much lower nutrient demand than a lactating one.

**Cull Old Stock** - The tendency is to keep breeding females around as long as they keep producing offspring. This would be the time to go through the herd, check for teeth, bad udders, eye and feet problems, and any temperament issues. An older animal will generally struggle more to stay in good body condition.

**Cull Unproductive Breeding Animals** - Anything that does not produce any offspring should be culled. No second chances when forage is scarce.

**Retain Few if any Replacements** - Weaned females have a high nutrient demand due to maintenance, growth, and reproduction. If the feed resources are scarce, you probably cannot afford to keep replacement-breeding females.

**Improve Herd Genetics** - Drought could provide an excellent opportunity to improve the uniformity of the herd and cull anything that does not fit your vision of the type of animal you want in your herd.

CRITICAL DATE

This is the date whereby if you have not received rain, you will start to destock. Based on conversations with ranchers, the critical date is either never or maybe June 1st. I might suggest that the critical date is sooner than June. April 1 could be a starting point for selecting a critical date and you could fine tune over time from there.

Remember, the earlier you begin to destock, the less severe you have to cull, there is more forage for the remaining herd, and you will hit the market before other people do meaning you will get a higher price. In today’s cattle market, most classes of stock have a high value. This more of a struggle in the sheep market.

Small ruminants will most likely provide greater flexibility provided you have the means to transport stock, are experienced with portable electric fencing, and have appropriate guardian animals. This is due to the high demand for property owners wanting to reduce fuel loads from annual vegetation and brush on your property. You still need to adhere to the never feed your way out of a drought principal because you need to evaluate the impact of increased fuel and labor costs to haul, set up fence, and check on animals.

Evaluate your breeding herd carefully during a drought and cull any unproductive animals or those that do not fit with the genetics you are trying to achieve on your ranch.
In 2010, I helped organize and facilitate a California Meat Summit at the California Department of Food and Agriculture’s building in Sacramento. The Summit featured presentations from USDA Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS) and facilitated discussion among niche meat producers, processors, and government agency representatives. Three broad discussion groups discussed issues with regulations, working with existing processors, and building new USDA inspected facilities.

The High Sierra Resource Conservation and Development Council successfully submitted a Rural Business Enterprise Grant (RBEG) to fund four projects to look deeper into issues brought up at the California Meat Summit. A 2013 California Meat Summit will be held in Placerville, CA on March 27th. Here is a link for more information: http://ucanr.edu/sites/Roger_Livestock/2013_California_Meat_Summit/

The following is synthesis of project finding and results. More detailed information will be presented on March 27th.

**Synthesis of Project Findings and Recommendations**

Dan Macon, High Sierra Resource Conservation and Development Council

California livestock producers often cite lack of federally inspected meat processing capacity (for both slaughter and cut-and-wrap) as a significant impediment to economic success. The lack of processing facilities, according to this perspective, depresses prices paid to ranchers and restricts their ability to market meat directly to customers.

Based on this reasoning, some believe that the solution is to re-build a system of smaller-scale, community-based, USDA-inspected meat processing plants. Local ranchers would "flock" to these plants - and local consumers would as well. Like the baseball diamond in the midst of a corn field, people assume that if we build a small-scale meat processing plant, "they [ranchers and consumers] will come." However, while the raw numbers look positive (a plant that can process 2500-3000 head of cattle each year appears to generate a positive return on investment), the details of actually operating such a plant are far less clear cut - for several reasons.

First, many producers talk about marketing their animals as meat directly to customers, but relatively few actually follow through on this marketing strategy. For example, a feasibility study completed in Siskiyou County in 2005 found that, "From a supply side, interviews with producers revealed that most commercial producers are happy with their present production arrangement...." Marketing meat is much more labor intensive and people-oriented than hauling steers or lambs to the auction. Many ranchers would rather leave the marketing to someone else - they’d like to think that a local processor would pay them more for their animals AND handle all of the marketing responsibilities. Based on the projects funded through this grant, we are not convinced that there are enough producers who want to raise, process and market animals to support this type of smaller-scale plant.

Secondly, for decades, the meat processing business has largely been organized on the factory or manufacturing model - processors purchase raw material (live animals), convert it to another form (meat), and market this product to the end user. The factory model profits by using labor and technology to convert raw materials into a product that consumers want. Producers who market their own meat rely on a different model: they need a processor to provide a service. In this service provider model, ownership of the raw material and the finished product is retained by the producer of the raw material. The processor earns income through the service provided by its labor and technology rather than through the margin between the cost of inputs and value of outputs. In the current system, there is a tension between these two models - most processors try to serve both roles (with varying degrees of success).

Producer decisions about which processor to use are driven by the value of the service received. For example, a large USDA-inspected lamb processor in northern California charges $75-80 (depending on how many lambs a producer delivers) to custom harvest and process lambs. If a rancher can process 20 lambs in one lot, his/her transportation costs are lower - in other words, he/she can get lambs converted into meat products for $85-90 each depending on his/her distance from the facility. Conversely, having a ranch slaughter service and local meat processor provide the same services will cost a producer at least $125 per head. This is a significant difference that can make a big impact on a rancher's bottom line. To win new business, a new local USDA processor would have to offer similar service at a competitive price. Based on our findings, it's not clear that this is possible.

In our survey of CDFA Custom-Exempt and USDA-inspected harvest and processing facilities, 69 CDFA Custom-Exempt establishments responded that they do operate on a service-provider model. Similarly, 32 USDA-inspected facilities (of which five were also CDFA-inspected) responded to our survey. While the mapping project revealed gaps in access to inspected facilities for producers, it also suggests opportunities for increased cooperation between producers and existing facilities. Given the difficulties (financial, regulatory and land use) in establishing a new facility, our findings suggest the continued need to support these existing establishments.

Producers who were surveyed about demand for beef slaughter and processing services from three specific regional companies indicated strong (if seasonal) demand for these services. Given California's Mediterranean climate, demand for processing drops significantly from January through April. While an existing company that also processes its own animals may be able to cope with this seasonal fluctuation, these survey results suggest that a start-up company may have difficulty with cash flow during the slower months. The survey also highlighted the types of processing services most demanded by producers - especially the ability to make ground products. Based on these survey results, at least one existing company has considered adding a beef line to its facility.

The survey, as well as a more informal poll taken in Quincy, suggests that most producers who are interested in direct marketing meat products are operating on a relatively small scale. These findings suggest that processors who wish to increase business within this segment will need to work with a large number of small producers in order to operate their facilities at or near capacity. Consequently, operations, animal tracking, accounting and other functions become more complicated given the greater number of individual producers. In other words, it is far
more complex for a processor to deal with many small producers than with fewer large producers, from both an operational and an administrative perspective.

Our project also examined opportunities for existing custom-exempt cut-and-wrap facilities to upgrade their facilities to obtain USDA inspection. While this strategy does not directly address the need for USDA-inspected harvest, it would potentially open up a wide array of possibilities for producers to work directly with local meat markets (which were mapped as part of yet another project). However, local custom-exempt meat markets may be reluctant to invest in facilities upgrades and deal with additional regulatory burdens to meet an uncertain demand for USDA-inspected processing. In many ways, the “culture” found in custom-exempt facilities is very different than that found in USDA-inspected plants, which further complicates efforts to “upgrade” existing operations.

Another solution might be to tackle the meat inspection regulatory system. Our meat inspection system was created to prevent the contamination of our food supply. Perhaps we need to look at a separate regulatory system that recognizes the differences between meat products that are marketed locally versus those that are shipped across the country or around the world. The white paper produced as part of this project suggests steps that would create greater regulatory flexibility while maintaining the highest degree of food safety.

Finally, there may be other opportunities for producers who market meat to cooperate. A survey conducted in Quincy as part of this project indicates that producers are interested in coordinating live animal and product transportation to and from processing facilities. Central shipping points and storage facilities would be relatively easy to establish and would help reduce individual producer costs.

To be sustainable over the long-term, producer and community decisions regarding meat processing and direct marketing must be made on sound economic principles. To assist in this effort, we have identified several spreadsheet templates for producers and communities alike to use in considering the economic feasibility of establishing slaughter/processing facilities. These templates are available through the Niche Meat Producers Assistance Network at www.nichemeatprocessing.org. We have also included a template for producers to use in evaluating the economic feasibility of direct marketing meat products.

**Inventory of Small and Niche Meat Harvesting and Processing Facilities with GIS Mapping**

**Project Lead:** Shermain Hardesty, University of California, Davis

Harvest and processing facilities were surveyed to determine whether they provide custom harvesting and processing services to individual producers. 213 CDFA Custom-Exempt facilities and 528 USDA-inspected facilities were contacted. A total of 96 facilities inspected by USDA or CDFA Custom-Exempt reported that they work with individual producers. Of these, 69 CDFA Custom-Exempt facilities indicated that they work with individual producers, as do 32 USDA-inspected facilities; five of these facilities reported being inspected by both agencies. Among the USDA-inspected facilities, 10 provide both slaughter and processing services, four offer only slaughter services and 18 offer only processing services. This database can be searched for facilities with specific characteristics, from the University of California Cooperative Extension Foothill Farming website: http://info.ucanr.org/smallfarms/index.html.
UPCOMING EVENTS

Contact Roger Ingram at (530) 889-7385 or rsingram@ucanr.edu to register or if you have questions. Check website for updated information at ceplacer.ucdavis.edu

Lambing Workshop
March 10, 2013
9:00 AM - 12:00 Noon
Auburn, CA

The topic for this workshop will be Pasture Lambing. Participants will learn how to efficiently manage a pasture lambing system. We’ll provide hands-on learning about lamb management and inoculations, dealing with lambing problems, and raising orphan lambs.

For more information, contact Dan Macon at (530) 305-3270 or flyingmulefarm.com

California Meat Summit
Wednesday, March 27th
10:00 AM - 3:00 PM
Placerville, CA

Online Registration Available at: http://ucanr.edu/cameatsummit

Fibershed Project

Do you raise sheep, alpacas or other fiber animals? Or do you grow cotton, flax, or other fibers? Our goal is to collect data on all the sheep and fiber animals in California. To that end, we have created a survey which we invite you to participate in. If you feel a mill based in north/central California would support your farm or ranch, then please take this survey.

Here is the survey: https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/CaliforniaFiberProducers

Each fiber farmer who completes the survey will be entered in our raffle of fibershed goods. Photos of our three beautiful prizes will be added soon!

Why are we doing this survey? Fibershed is in the process of researching and analyzing California’s wool supply for quality, quantity, and land management practices, in collaboration with UC Davis Sustainable Agriculture Capstone interns.

Here is our website with some more explanation: http://www.fibershed.com/survey/

Paicines Ranch Field Day—
Increasing Profit, Production, and Performance for the Triple Bottom Line

Date(s): April 26, 2013
Location(s): Paicines Ranch, Paicines, CA
Time(s): 9:30 AM - 4:30 PM

Brief Description/Summary: This on-farm learning opportunity at Paicines Ranch is for ranchers and land owners as well as folks interested in learning about sustainable ranching. Learn from ranchers about how they are growing more perennial grasses and improving soil health. This field day will also focus on easy and effective biological monitoring techniques and how to develop ranch infrastructure to improve profit, forage utilization and animal performance. Join resource managers from around California to learn together how to create a sustainable agriculture and healthy land in California.

For more information and to register, have them go to www.holisticmanagement.org

Beginning Farmer and Rancher Academy
April 5-6
UCCE Office - Auburn, CA

More information coming soon.

California Grazing Academy
April 26-27
Sierra Research and Extension Center
Browns Valley, CA

See newsletter for information

Low-Stress Livestock Handling
May 9 - 10, 2013
Cal Poly Swanton Pacific Research, Davenport, CA

See flyer for information

Roger Ingram
County Director, Placer and Nevada Counties
2012 California Grazing Academy Registration Form

Registration is also available online at

http://ucanr.org/sites/Roger_Livestock/?calitem=177121&g=29082

Register: Complete this form, mail with your check payable to

University of California, REGENTS to:
Roger Ingram
California Grazing Academy
11477 E Ave.
Auburn, CA 95603

First Name ___________________________ Last Name ___________________________

Address: ____________________________________________________________

City ___________________________ State/Zip _______________________________

Email: ___________________________ Phone Number: ________________________

What types of animals do you graze or manage? ______________________________

How many head? ______________ On how many acres? ______________
STOCKMANSHIP

Low-Stress Livestock Handling
A Workshop Sponsored By

The Whole Picture
Hand 'n Hand Livestock Solutions
Livestock & Land

A 2-Day Workshop in Santa Cruz County
Thursday and Friday May 9 and 10, 2013
8:00 am - 5:00 pm each day


Learn Through Classroom & Field Work the Economic, Social, & Environmental Benefits of Stockmanship, Including: Communicating With Livestock; Herd Training & Management; Sorting, Loading, Receiving & Weaning; Knowing Why Animals Are Never Wrong; Economic Benefits; Managing Livestock to Benefit Water Quality & Biodiversity; and Much More.

Meals and 2 Nights Lodging are Included in Workshop Cost of $375
Scholarships are Available for A Limited Number of Young Ranchers/Students

Registration is February 15 – April 19, 2013 and is limited to 20 Participants.

For Information go to www.cowboyconservation.com, or contact
The Whole Picture Consulting, LLC, 916.214.2582, info@cowboyconservation.com

With Special Performance By
ADRIAN
BUCKAROOGIRL
Thursday Night at the BBQ