

2026 UC ANR Position: UCCE Livestock and Natural Resources Advisor San Luis Obispo (headquarters), Santa Barbara, and Ventura Counties

Developed and proposed by: The Area Director and local CE Advisors with the UC ANR Beef Production Program Team (PT) and Range and Grazing Systems PT developed this proposal. Additional comments and endorsements were provided by the Fire Network Director and Hansen Agricultural Research and Extension Center Director. External input to this proposal was provided by the Agricultural Commissioners in San Luis Obispo (SLO) and Santa Barbara (SB) counties, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and two local Resource Conservation Districts (RCD) all of whom recognize the critical importance of this position to local communities and ANR's mission.

Position title: UCCE Livestock and Natural Resources Advisor

Headquarter location and coverage area: The position will be headquartered in the SLO UCCE office and will also provide coverage to SB and Ventura Counties. The headquarters is centrally located for reaching clientele in SLO and northern SB County, where the majority of rangeland exists; Ventura support will be more limited, focusing on phone and web consultation and occasional visits.

The advisor joins an existing SLO advisor team (Disaster Resilience, IPM, Health Equity, 4-H) and will have the opportunity to innovate and build upon Royce Larsen's (retiring June 2026) drought-monitoring projects, forage programs, and Board-appointed committee seats, with a ready clientele base including one of the largest cattlemen's associations in the state.

Position overview:

- a) **General disciplinary focus:** This position will support innovative, science-based approaches to complex challenges in livestock and rangeland management, working across UC ANR Program Areas to cover animal health, livestock profitability, food safety, sustainable grazing, wildfire resilience, prescribed fire, soil health, water management, and rangeland improvement through engagement with ranchers, land managers, local tribes, and communities.
- b) **Qualifications and reporting:** A minimum of a master's degree in animal science, range management, or a related field is required; a Certified Range Manager license (CA State Board of Forestry) will be required within five years of hiring, with support provided. The advisor will report to the Area Director, be incorporated into the SLO, SB, and Ventura UCCE teams, and provide UC expertise to SLO County Grazing Advisory Board and the SB Ag Preserve Advisory Committee.

Justification:

Needs: Livestock production and rangeland management in SLO, SB, and Ventura Counties face overlapping pressures from urban expansion, climate variability, invasive species, and regulatory complexity that are eroding the long-term viability of working ranches. These working lands provide critical services including wildfire risk reduction, watershed function, biodiversity conservation, and food production. Innovative, locally based UC expertise is essential to sustain this industry. A survey was sent to clientele in the area to understand their needs for a Livestock and Natural Resources Advisor. The top five concerns were centered around rangeland health including prescribed and wildland fire, drought planning, invasive plants, forage production, and general rangeland management. Animal health, genetics and herd management, managed and targeted grazing, and regulations and policies rounded out the top 10 concerns ranchers have in the region. The clientele in the area are ready to work with a Livestock and Natural Resources

Advisor to problem solve and support sustainable and thriving working lands. Local partners, including RCDs and Cal Poly are ready to collaborate with a new advisor who will serve as a critical link between campus-based research and on the ground technical assistance providers while driving innovation and promoting resiliency in the region.

This position ranked 1st for Beef Production and 2nd for Rangeland & Grazing Systems PTs, and is a priority for the Fire Network because of the critical need for fire-related capacity in these counties where ANR previously served a central role in coordinating and supporting fire-related range management and prescribed fire activities and research. An ongoing needs assessment found that in 39 stakeholder discussions, a Livestock and Range Advisor for SLO and SB was mentioned 17 times (**the highest mention of any position**). SLO is critically low on UC expertise across agricultural production (1 advisor) and all three counties will have a gap in natural resource and livestock expertise after Larsen's June retirement (0 advisors). The Central Coast RCD has identified more than 27 priority topic areas for rangeland education, underscoring the breadth of unmet need. Active local Cattlemen's Associations and Range Improvement Association offer direct avenues for extending research and early programming impact.

Rangeland covers 4.4M acres across the three counties—nearly 90% of total land area—with grazing accounting for over half of SLO and SB ag land and more than 40% of Ventura's 300K acres. Combined annual agricultural output exceeds \$5B, with cattle and calves contributing \$65M in SLO, \$52M in SB, and \$10M in Ventura. SLO County ranks among California's top three beef cow counties. Small ruminants, sheep and goats, are a vital component as well, even though they do not break the top 10 for commodities in the counties. There are more transient small ruminants coming into the counties for targeted grazing, especially after passage of Senator Limón's (Santa Barbara) SB 675. Large, targeted grazing operators are also headquartered in the region.

Ongoing climate variability, over-drafted groundwater basins, and SB 552 drought planning require producers to continually adapt stocking, water, and land management decisions, while recent large fires on grazed rangeland (Lake, Madre, and Gifford) have underscored the need for place-based guidance on grazing, fuel management, and post-fire recovery. Livestock operations also increasingly intersect with specialty crops in the region, requiring coordination around food safety and regulatory compliance.

Outcomes/Impact: Measurable outcomes that this advisor will contribute to include documentation of research based economical management practices to improve industry viability, adoption of improved stewardship of the extensive public and private grazing lands in the counties, reduced economic loss from animal diseases, and adoption of research-based management practices to improve fire and drought resilience and recovery.

Directly, this Advisor will contribute to the UC ANR public values: Improved animal management; improved land stewardship; and increased ecological sustainability of agriculture, working landscapes, and natural ecosystems. UC ANR's Vision 2040 highlights the importance of protecting and restoring natural ecosystems and working landscapes through key actions that could be addressed by this advisor, including: promoting sustainable land stewardship; engaging land managers, including Tribal communities, in biodiversity conservation; research and outreach to prevent the impact of invasive pests on working lands; implementing strategies to sustainably manage water resources and improve soil health; and guide management promoting wildfire resilience on rangelands.

Extension:

A recent survey of clientele in this region indicated a need for science-based information extended

through newsletters, hands on workshops, field days, pre-recorded videos in both short and long formats, and ranch calls on topics listed above in the needs section. Key clientele groups include landowners, land managers and agency partners as defined specifically in External Partners below.

Research:

In collaboration with ANR advisors, CE specialists (including UC Santa Barbara CE Wildfire Specialist, Max Moritz), AES researchers, and external partners, this advisor will develop and evaluate evidence-based land and animal management practices. Research topics may include forage production, livestock welfare and nutrition, food safety, water and soil quality, ecosystem services, wildfire resilience, invasive plant and animal pests, predator concerns, land access, and local meat processing. Findings will be published in journals such as *Rangeland Ecology and Management*, *Rangelands Translational Animal Science*, *Invasive Plant Science*, and *California Agriculture*, and popularized through ANR publications, websites, and newsletters.

UC ANR network:

This position fills a critical gap in the ANR network as the southernmost Livestock and Natural Resources Advisor in California in a region that is one of the most productive, yet drought prone areas of CA. Upcoming and previous retirements in the area create an urgent need to input ANR resources in an area of strategic importance and critical need. The advisor will work through three Program Teams—Beef Production, Rangeland and Grazing Systems, and Specialty Livestock and Poultry—collaborating with regional advisors (Disaster Resilience, 4-H on career pathways, IPM, etc.), UC Davis specialists, UC Vet Med, UC Berkeley, UCSB Specialist Moritz, Fire Advisors, and invasive plant colleagues statewide. The Central Coast’s unique ecosystem mix and Cal Poly’s 4,000+ SLO County acres offer exceptional region-specific research opportunities unavailable elsewhere in the ANR network.

Network external to UC ANR:

The advisor will work with ranchers, land managers, local livestock associations and farm bureaus, RCDs, USDA NRCS, BLM, USFS, Cal Poly, Fire Safe Councils, County Agriculture Commissioners, Range Improvement Associations, and others to support livestock management, fire preparedness, post-fire recovery, invasive species control, forage monitoring, drought planning, livestock–produce coexistence, and new rancher workforce development.

Support: SLO County provides generous operating support to UCCE. This advisor will have access to:

- a) Transportation: Truck, ATV with trailer for work on remote rangeland areas
- b) Facilities: Office space in SLO and workstations in SB and Ventura, lab with drying oven (expanded facilities planned in the future)
- c) Administrative support staff for research admin and extension support
- d) Travel and equipment funds for projects in SB and Ventura

Other support: Research funding this advisor can pursue include the Rustici Range and Cattle Research Endowment, WSARE, NIFA, Fire Safe Council, UC Vet Med CFAH, and Thelma Hansen Grant. Industry support from Cattlemen’s Associations can be counted on to provide extension support including funding and advertisement for extension events. Requests can be made to SLO, SB and Ventura counties who have previously provided funding, supplies, or staffing for forage and drought research projects. In addition, livestock pharmaceutical companies, herbicide and pest control companies, and state cattle organizations can provide funding support for research and extension.