



featured

Lander area small-acreage owner takes his home to work

Incorporates lessons learned into his job as rangeland management specialist

By Jeri Trebelcock

Scott Fluor likes to practice what he preaches.

He prides himself as an out-of-the-box thinker, and he likes to spend time investigating ways to improve his own operation and incorporate those ideas into his “real” job as a rangeland management specialist for the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

Fluor has been involved with agriculture his whole life, but when he started in Lander with the BLM in 1990, he also started leasing small parcels of land. “I saw the opportunity to keep agriculture alive, even on the small acreages as larger properties started to get subdivided,” he says. “To me, it’s an opportunity to be able to utilize the resources on these smaller acreage places.”

The Fluor family, including wife, Kelly, and children



From left, Alec, Ella, and Sara Fluor enjoy a ride in green pastures.

Sara, 19, an animal science major at the University of Wyoming, Craig, 16, Ella, 10, and Alec, 7, are so good at managing their operation, Scott was honored as Wyoming’s first Outstanding Small Acreage Cooperator in 2008 by the Wyoming Association of Conservation Districts.

Their base property consists of approximately 30 acres of irrigated land five miles north of Lander.

They raise yearling steers, a small flock of registered Targhee ewes, and several ranch horses.

Over the years, the Fluors have improved their flood irrigation system to better manage water and improve production and have implemented a rotational grazing system to allow for adequate regrowth during the grazing season. Through diligent efforts, the Fluors have been able

to improve their irrigated pasture to the point they now raise certified weed-free hay that can be sold at a premium (for information about weed-free hay, see Ask Sam in the Fall 2007 *Barnyards & Backyards* magazine, or go to <http://barnyardsandbackyards.com/Articles/2007.htm>, and see the link for Ask Sam under Fall 2007).

Leasing Parcels Expands Operation

In addition to their own property, they lease additional land, knitting together small parcels to make their operation financially viable. The leases include 136 irrigated acres and 460 rangeland acres across the Lander Valley. On their land alone, the Fluors would be limited to no more than 15 to 20 head of cattle with supplement feeding; however, by acquiring additional leases, they now graze 60 steers with hopes

landowner



Scott Fluer was named 2008 Outstanding Small Acreage Cooperator by the Wyoming Association of Conservation Districts.

of adding an additional 25 cow/calf pairs this summer.

The base property is hayed and set aside from grazing during the summer with the exception of the Targhee ewes. The purebred sheep operation is Sara and Ella's 4-H breeding sheep project. The sheep stay at the home place year-round, and grazing is intensively managed

with electric net fence. Fluer says the net fence is like woven wire only it's nylon and portable.

The fence comes in 164-foot lengths and can be installed or taken down by one person in minutes. Using the portable electric fence, the sheep are on ditch banks to keep the grass mowed down, which, in turn, makes setting dams

and irrigation easier.

Some of the leased parcels are on live streams, and when off-site water is not available, Scott uses his portable electric fence to fence off the stream and create a small designated area for livestock to access water. These "water gaps" are placed in areas less susceptible to bank trampling but allow access to

drinking water. Water gaps provide management tools to reduce the time the livestock spend near water, isolate the areas that cattle use, and limit the potential for manure to enter the stream.

The Fluers put up hay for winter feed, and they also sell weed-free hay to local horse customers. Leftover hay is fed in the



All Fluer family members help with the work, including 7-year-old Alec.



The Fluer base property includes 30 acres of irrigated land near Lander.

spring prior to the cattle being moved to leased pasture. All stock is brought back to the base property in the fall. Fluer says, "Everything goes through the base property but does not spend a lot of time there so that we are able to provide adequate rest to our pastures and hayland."

Electric Fencing a Key Component

Fluer says, "My primary tools for management include the pickup, horses, stock trailer, panels, electric fence, and family."

With the use of livestock panels, stock trailer, and solar-charged electric fence, the operation is portable. "When we lease a property, we typically rely on a special kind of poly rope electric fencing that allows us

to split and rotate the pastures," he says. He uses a single ¼-inch electric rope.

"Once the yearlings are trained to the electric fence, we don't have any problems," he says. "I like using it because it's round, it rolls up easy, and the wind passes around it better than a tape fence. I put the fence waist high or nose high to a cow. It doesn't take long to train cattle to the electric fence; as long as they all get shocked once on the nose you'll never have any problems again."

The steers gain on average about 2.5-2.8 pounds per day. "We buy our calves in the spring and feed what hay we have left and then go to grass with them," he notes. "We buy local cattle from the sale barn. So, our gain varies on breed and background. We try and buy all the same size and weight cattle, so we have a uniform package in the fall."

Leasing parcels also comes with maintenance and stewardship responsibilities to help ensure the lease can be long term. He says, "Creating and maintaining relationships with lessees is key to the success of the operation."

He also believes he conveys a conservation ethic to his lessees. "It's not easy finding leases, but one has to be diligent in this effort; word of mouth most often is how we obtain them," Fluer says.

Dedicate Time for Management

The Fluers stay plenty busy managing grazing, cleaning ditches, dragging fields to break up the winter's accumulation of manure on the pastures, treating weeds, and maintaining fence.

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“To run that many animals through a system such as ours, you must be attentive,” Fluer says. “You must be able to dedicate time for management, you have to continually educate yourself, and you must have a true interest.”

Fluer says this is relaxing, and he finds it extremely rewarding, sometimes monetarily, but mostly mentally.

The landowners he leases from also benefit monetarily, but they also are able to maintain their agriculture tax status and keep the land undeveloped and in agricultural production. Most of them say they enjoy watching the animals grazing peacefully without the burden of owning stock, animal care, buying and selling cattle, etc.

“I know we’re small in scale, but as society continues to grow and the larger farms and ranches sell out, I see the niche for smaller ones like ours,” Fluer says. “This allows for my family and me to be able to afford an agricultural operation. It is our link to agriculture we couldn’t afford otherwise. We’re very fortunate to live out of town, maintaining open space and personal space. Perhaps, just as important to us, it allows our kids to have an upbringing tied to the land, with responsibilities of caring for livestock and being involved in 4-H projects while still participating in local community activities. We are fortunate to have the best of both worlds.”



Ella Fluer holds a Targhee sheep, part of a 4-H sheep breeding project.