

Southeast Wyoming grazing school helps ranchers improve profitability, manage resources

Situation:

According to information in Wyoming Agricultural Statistics 2010, livestock production accounts for 77 percent of cash receipts from agriculture. Major factors determining ranch profitability are forage productivity and harvest efficiency of the grazing livestock.

Management intensive grazing (MiG) uses short, intensive grazing periods

to greatly improve harvest efficiency of grazing livestock and productive capacity of grazing lands. This is a viable alternative to harvesting hay on irrigated meadows or productive pasture land. Economic analyses of ranches in southeast Wyoming through the High Plains Ranch Practicum indicate hay harvesting operations on many ranches are unprofitable but operators are unwilling

to stop for lack of a perceived viable alternative.

A four-day school in June 2011 in Wheatland provided producers hands-on experiences to learn the skills and gain the knowledge necessary to implement MiG. Four University of Wyoming Extension educators and two state specialists planned and taught the school. One outside consultant assisted in teach-

ing. Thirty-one ranchers and agricultural professionals attended with a fee of \$300 per participant. They owned or managed 187,000 acres of land and 21,000 head of livestock. Morning classroom lectures presented concepts, and afternoon sessions applied these concepts in a pasture setting using both fence and cattle. In the afternoons, participants were given grazing objectives and built grazing paddocks sized to accomplish those objectives.

Impacts:

Participants ranked their behaviors in implementing practices taught at the school. They rated behaviors before and after attending from 1 (never) to 4 (almost always).

Behavior	Before	After	Change
Using MiG	2.45	4.05	1.59
Use of fencing tools	2.64	3.95	1.32
Plan grazing	2.86	4.23	1.36
Evaluate pasture utilization	2.05	4.14	2.09
Winter graze	2.86	4.27	1.41
Record grazing activity	2.09	4.36	2.27

Participants listed changes they would make. A sample of comments included:

- Intensify my winter grazing management in hope of better animal performance.
- Will continue to improve our program, especially will start doing cost analyses and recording forage amounts available.
- Convert everything to year-round grazing by matching stock to resources. Improve forage quality and pasture capability. My planned goal is to improve the land and its resources by grazing it with intensive management.
- Try to graze winter with windrow hay; understand importance of good-quality water availability importance; manage water better; graze better to stage 2 not stage 1.

Participants were asked if the time and money spent for the school are good investments. Comments included:

- Excellent. Course extremely well-taught. Impact of minimal hay feeding is sobering but transitioning will have to be made over a period of several years. Financial analysis and forage reserve estimation are two of the most significant areas that need improvement.
- Absolutely! This fits in extremely well with the timing of my operation and its establishment using MiG processes to be the foundational planning or bedrock in how the operation will be organized.
- Definitely; helped me to analyze resources and plan more effectively; resources from UW Extension individuals very valuable; Jim Gerrish was outstanding and very helpful.

Participants evaluated the expected impact on profitability of their operations. Those raising livestock estimated profitability improved \$43.54 per head. When extrapolated by number of head managed by each participant, the total estimated improvement as a result of attending the school is \$527,600.



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...resources from UW Extension individuals very valuable

