

Participants report **SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENTS** to

SITUATION

Successful ranch management requires a diverse set of skills utilizing an integrated approach to decision making in a complex, dynamic production system. The High Plains Ranch Practicum (HPRP) is a hands-on learning experience that uses an integrated learning approach in which participants are taught tools, information, and skills to improve ranch management. The practicum is taught by University of Nebraska-Lincoln and University of Wyoming Extension educators and specialists. Industry experts are auxiliary instructors.

The HPRP courses include eight-10 days of classroom and hands-on instruction over a nine-month period focused on understanding forage resources, beef cow production, unit cost of production, risk management, marketing, and family working relationships. Presentations, case studies, small group problem sets/discussions, field experiences, and tours are used as learning opportunities. Curriculum is developed and based on current research and information pertaining to ranch management. Information on impact to participants is from follow-up survey data from 117 participants in practicums from 2007

through 2012. Forty-nine individuals or operations returned completed surveys.

IMPACTS

The HPRP had six classes complete the course from 2007 through 2012. A follow-up survey was sent one to three years after completion of each class to identify how knowledge gained and skills learned affected participant management practices, stewardship of natural resources, and business profitability. Participants evaluated and compared the percentage of time the management skills and tools were utilized before versus after taking the class.

- Participants showed on average a 40-percent or greater increase in the time they utilize cow body condition scoring for decision making.
- Participants showed on average a 25-percent or greater increase in the time they evaluate supplemental protein sources, feed costs, calculate unit cost of production, and utilize a marketing plan.

High Plains Ranch Practicum participants report changing management practices, enhanced natural

resources, and improved profitability as a result of knowledge gained. Forty-nine operations managing 636,000 acres and 17,000 cattle made management changes that increased profit by more than \$440,000, as reported in the survey.

Participants were asked to identify practices they changed.

- 80 percent or more made changes in their uses of a business plan, unit cost of production, and replacement heifer development.
- 70 percent or more made changes to communication and interaction in their family businesses and working relationships.
- 60 percent or more made changes in their use/source of protein supplements and marketing of cattle/cull cows.
- 40 percent or more made changes to their time of calving, time of weaning, use/source of minerals, and use of crop residue.

Ranching is a business based primarily on use of grazing resources. A significant portion of instruction focused on helping students learn more about their grazing resources and how to effectively and sustainably manage them. Participants evaluated and compared the percentage of time these practices and skills were utilized in decision making before versus after taking the class.

- Participants showed a 40-percent or greater increase in the percent of time they utilized grazing and precipitation records.



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ranch profitability

The following are a sample of statements participants reported they made as a result of knowledge gained:

“I was already moving toward changing our calving season, but the practicum really helped me formulate a plan to make the transition as well as implementing new management strategies as it related to later calving season and also in range management practices.”

“I purchased drought insurance and instituted a rotational grazing plan. I am developing stock water and was approved for a Conservation Stewardship Program contract. I also am designing a low-stress cattle handling/loading facility.”

“We changed cows from fall calving to May/June. Cows are grazing more crop residues, and we are going to drill oats/peas/radishes/turnips for feed. “

“The biggest change is in my heifer development program. I have seen great increases in my cattle as a result of implementing these practices (presented in the practicum).”

“We have done a better job of measuring the unit cost of production (UCOP). I think the UCOP presentations are extremely valuable. We gained knowledge and have changed some practices related to animal handling and vaccinations.”



- Participants showed a 30-percent or greater increase in the percent of time they utilized plant identification and plant growth in development.

- Participants showed a 25-percent or greater increase in the percent of time they utilized a change in pasture rotations from year to year, performed a range condition assessment, and utilized a drought management plan.

Long-term profitability and productivity is important to a cattle ranch's success. More than 70 percent of practicum participants reported knowledge gained increased profitability of their cattle enterprises.