

HIGH PLAINS RANCH PRACTICUM IMPROVES PARTICIPANT PROFITABILITY, QUALITY OF LIFE

Situation

Wyoming agriculture in 2013 produced \$2 billion of value, and livestock production accounts for 76 percent of the cash receipts (Wyoming Agriculture Statistics 2015). That ranches in Wyoming remain economically viable and environmentally sustainable is imperative to Wyoming's economy.

Sustainable ranch businesses require a systems approach to decision making for successful working relationships and effective management of finances,

livestock, forage, and natural resources. The High Plains Ranch Practicum is a comprehensive ranch management school focused on a systems approach to ranch management. The practicum is an applied learning experience consisting of eight full days over seven months of combined classroom learning and hands-on field application of the concepts and skills. Firsthand experience and discussion about changes that occurred to cattle and range conditions solidified concepts taught throughout the course.



The ranch practicum is a partnership between the University of Wyoming Extension and University of Nebraska Extension.

Impact

Two schools were held in 2014/15. One based out of Kimball, Nebraska, had 22 participants, and another based out of Laramie had 27 participants. School participants were asked the final day to complete a survey to capture their knowledge gained, skills and practices adapted, economic benefit to their businesses, and a scope of the impact on the resources they control or have influence over. A total of 32 surveys were returned. Those completing surveys indicated knowledge gained would influence 288 people, management for 15,500 beef cattle, and 351,000 acres of land. Producers reported the classes resulted in \$385,000 improvement in net income to their operations.

Practicum participants indicated because of knowledge gained:

- 88 percent would be likely or very likely to use cow body condition as a management tool.
- 94 percent would be likely or very likely to use Unit Cost of Production (UCOP) as a decision making tool.
- 94 percent would be likely or very likely to use tools and knowledge to improve range management or natural resource management.

Participants reported making or planning to make the following changes as a result of attending the class:

“Be more involved in management decisions, human relationships, and business development (mission, goals, finances, economics).”

“I would like to improve the family relationship so we can utilize UCOP info. I would really like to implement a more management-intensive grazing system to reduce or eliminate overgrazing/underutilization problems. I would like to cut back the hay feeding to just two months or ultimately no haying at all.”

“I will look at my different summer pasture plants and try new methods to increase the desirable ones.”

The cost for the High Plains Ranch Practicum is \$600 per person. A tuition reimbursement of \$300 per person was provided to those completing the course requirements. This tuition reimbursement was made possible by carry-over grant funding from the Western Center for Risk Management Education and USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture Beginning Rancher Development Program.

Following are two participant comments when asked if the resources invested in the ranch practicum were a good investment:

“Yes, it provided the resources to better understand our operation, give a better grasp on ranching industry as a whole, and hopefully to make more informed managerial decisions in the future.”

“Yes, this will help me become a better manager/owner when I take over the ranch and show the parents I am truly interested in taking over.”



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