



# GRASSROOTS

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## **SRM Events in June**

The SD Section of SRM will be putting on two of their annual workshops in June.

The first is the SD Range Camp on June 4-6 in Sturgis. Range Camp is open to young adults from 14 through 18 years of age who have a sincere desire to learn more about the range resources and its management. Youth from town or country are equally welcome. Enrollment will be limited to 60 and will be filled on a first-come, first-serve basis.

The second is the SD Rangeland Days held in conjunction with SD Soil Days on June 19-20. This event is going to be held in the Philip area with much of the outdoor activities being held at the SDSU Cottonwood Research Station. Learning activities have been designed for a variety of age groups and expertise, from 8 years old through adult. Starting with plant morphology and identification on up to judging habitat suitability for cattle or grouse, everyone attending Rangeland Days is sure to gain from participating.

Both of these events are being offered for continuing education credit. Please let us know if you need to take these courses for continuing education credits. We hope to see you at both of the great events! Feel free to contact Kyle Schell if you would like more information about either event.

For more information or other events the **SOUTH DAKOTA GRASSLAND COALITION** is involved with, please contact Kyle Schell or visit the website: <http://www.sdgrass.org>

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## Drought Plan

By: Garnet Perman

Have you seen all the hay headed south? At \$125/ton just for shipping, it makes a person think about putting together a drought plan. After all, in South Dakota, we're always just two weeks away from a drought.

For this article, we talked to Rick Doud (843-2262), Jim Faulstich (852-2622), Dan Rasmussen (344-2250) and Dave Steffen (775-9112). They all have a plan on paper that has served them well over the past decade. Ed Blair (347-1180) is also listed as a drought planning mentor and has plenty of experience managing dry conditions.

**The first step in preparing a drought plan is to have a good grazing plan.** A grazing plan buffers against dry weather for the first few months. "You need to consider the possibility yearly. Then you're prepared because you haven't overgrazed," said Rasmussen. He's noticed a big difference between the grass in pastures that are rotationally grazed and pastures with season long grazing. "Rotational grazing makes for healthy pastures," he said.

**The second step in a drought plan is a destocking plan.** Steffen is from Burke and runs yearlings. His plan has a formula with trigger points. He looks at rainfall records from Gregory, the nearest official measuring site for the past 30 years plus his own on ranch data for the past 13-14 years. If rainfall is 10-20% of normal by the beginning of the growing season, he cuts the stocking rate by 10%. If moisture is 50% of normal by July 1, he starts putting together a marketing plan. Historically, August offers good yearling prices. He's been known to sell everything then and just let the grass grow if the price is right, even in a good year. His pastures generally have 50% plus cover in the fall, when he will take in cows without calves. Jim Faulstich has several critical dates for destocking as does Doud. Faulstich started his 2012 grazing October 1, 2011 by looking at available forage and rainfall records. April 1 is another key date. May 1 is when he decides

whether or not to implement the destocking plan. Research data on their ranch shows a direct correlation between April moisture and the pounds of beef produced. During calving, cows are ranked for quality, age and disposition. He's weaned calves from those cows as early as 60 days of age and sent the cows to town. Faulstich also has a custom grazing program that he can alter as needed. Doud said "The hardest part about having a trigger date is sticking with it." Doud and Rasmussen sell yearlings off first, then cull cows.

**The third step is to figure out a way to stretch out grazing.** Doud slows the rotation to allow longer rest periods between grazing. Faulstich has warm season plantings, CRP and corn stalks to fall back on. Faulstich also has 3 sheds full hay, just in case. "It's really a disaster plan for hail and tough winters, too," he said. He added that it would not be economical to build hay storage, but perhaps it can be wrapped or covered another way. Steffen emphasized that if a person buys hay, they should know the pasture it came from to avoid importing noxious weeds.

Steffen, Doud and Rasmussen advocate destocking or renting some kind of grazing before spending money on hay. Both Steffen and Doud said, "You can't feed your way out of a drought."

**Access to water** is another critical part of a drought plan. Doud hauled water in '02 and '06. He now has rural water in every pasture. When he depended on stock dams, the water levels on May 15 were one of his triggers. With rural water, he can put that trigger off to June 1. Steffen manages the water cycle on his ranch in part by leaving plenty of plant residue because it holds moisture.

Steffen noted that if a drought lasts beyond two years, his plan is incomplete. Hopefully none of us will ever have to worry about that third or fourth year.

## NRCS's SAGE GROUSE INITIATIVE

By: Gillian Brooks

The Greater Sage Grouse, a ground-dwelling bird native to the sagebrush landscapes of western South Dakota, has experienced a significant decline in population throughout the bird's distribution (11 western U.S. states, 2 Canadian provinces). In response to this documented decline, the NRCS launched the Sage Grouse Initiative (SGI) in 2010. SGI looks to restore Sage Grouse populations while simultaneously assisting producers in sustaining working ranches.

Landowners and operators in Butte, Harding, and Fall River counties within the range of Greater Sage Grouse can apply for an SGI Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) contract. Pheasants Forever partner biologists and NRCS staff will work with ranchers to develop conservation plans focused on grazing management, predator minimization, and improvements to grazing land structural practices such as livestock water. The SGI aims to focus on practices that are practical to livestock producers, ensure sustainable ranching practices are in place, and operates on the premise that what is good for Sage Grouse is good for ranching.

NRCS is currently taking applications and can begin planning with ranchers immediately in anticipation of 2012 SGI contracts. **If you have any questions please visit your local NRCS Field office or contact Gillian Brooks or Mitch Faulkner at 605-892-3368 extension 3.**



Photo: US FWS

## Available Conservation Practices thru Sage Grouse Initiative EQIP:

- ✚ Brush Management (invasive/noxious)
- ✚ Fence (construction, removal, retrofitting)
- ✚ Range Planting
- ✚ Restoration & Management of Declining Habitats
- ✚ Riparian Herbaceous Cover
- ✚ Obstruction Removal (removal of unwanted structures, debris, or other materials)
- ✚ Upland Wildlife Management
  - **\$15.21/acre** enrolled in a livestock exclusion/rest rotation grazing system
  - **\$5.60/acre** enrolled in a rotational grazing system
- ✚ Pipeline
- ✚ Pumping Plant
- ✚ Water Well
- ✚ Watering Facility

## Rainfall Simulator on YouTube

Many of you have seen the rainfall simulator at different SDGC events but if you have not, now you can watch it online. This fascinating demonstration is a must see for people interested in conservation. Employees of the NRCS in SD have put together a YouTube video showing this demonstration. To view it, just go to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=74LeiuwhvM>. This demonstration tells the story of conservation of our natural resources as nothing else can.



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### Calendar of events:

<u>Event</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Contact Person</u>	<u>Phone No.</u>
Range Camp	June 4-6	Sturgis, SD	Tate Lantz	605-343-1643
SD Bird Tour	June 8-9	Belle Fourche, SD	Judge Jessop	605-280-0127
Rangeland Days	June 19-20	Philip, SD	Kyle Schell	605-394-1722
Leopold Ranch Tour	June 21	Hayes, SD	Judge Jessop	605-280-0127
SD AgXchange	June 28-29	Pierre, SD	Kyle Schell	605-394-1722
Rangeland Health Training	July 17-20	Belle Fourche, SD	Kyle Schell	605-394-1722
Tri-State Grazing Conference	Aug 21-22	Hankinson, ND	Kyle Schell	605-394-1722
SD Grazing School	Sep 10-14	Chamberlain, SD	Kyle Schell	605-394-1722
HRM Workshop-Josh Dukart	Sep 25-26	Bison, SD	Ryan Beer	605-244-5222

Please remit any comments, suggestions, or topics deemed necessary for further review to: Kyle Schell, SDSU-1530 Samco Rd, Rapid City, SD 57702, [kyle.schell@sdstate.edu](mailto:kyle.schell@sdstate.edu), (605) 394-1722