



Grassroots

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Range 101: SDSU Range Program Update by Sandy Smart

This is a hard article for me to write because of my long tenure at SDSU and my love of rangeland education. As of fall 2019, the Rangeland Ecology and Management major will become a specialization under the Ecology and Environmental Science major. This step was necessary because of continued low enrollment (see graph below) and Board of Regents policy to meet certain minimum graduation rates. As you can see the range major was never a large enrollment program, with less than 50 students at any given point.



The Department of Natural Resource Management will continue to promote all our majors (including specializations) as core program areas. More importantly, the range program will maintain its accreditation from the Society for Range Management because the name of the specialization will be written on the student's official transcripts and all accreditation standards will be met. Curriculum will include an additional chemistry class and one physics class. The range courses will remain the same. However, students will now be required to take one credit of Range Judging in either the Plant ID or the Undergraduate Range Management Exam (URME) contest at the annual Society for Range Management meetings. The faculty wanted to strengthen the student's experience in learning about their parent society of which the Range Club represents. In addition, students will be required to take one credit of either internship, field experience, independent study, or undergraduate research.

On the bright side, we have a strong faculty team in research, teaching, and extension positions in rangeland ecology and management—Dr. Krista Ehlert, Dr. Pat Johnson, Dr. Maribeth Latvis, Dr. Josh Leffler, Dr. Lan Xu and myself. The job market remains high for students in this field. NRCS, Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Indian Affairs, non governmental agencies, and private consultants are in need of broadly trained range students. If you look at the NRCS employee directory, you will find 30 or more SDSU range program alumni. One thing I have learned over the years is that nothing stays the same. We are still committed to offer excellent range education at SDSU.

The Green Side Up: Calving Challenges? Considerations for Alternative Timeframes that Take into Account Your Operation by Pete Bauman



(Photo by S. Smart)

Have past or recent weather events made you pause when you think of your calving dates? Many producers across South Dakota have asked themselves this same question over the years. The impacts of these weather events are challenging for some producers, but devastating for others. Now that things are drying out and spring is ebbing into summer, it's a good time to look back and look ahead to evaluate and consider alternatives that can improve calving conditions and quality of life while also reducing financial and health risks.

If you are considering alternative timeframes for calving, this article will serve as a jumping off point for different aspects you should consider. However, each operation is unique, so this article will not necessarily provide all the answers, but there are common threads. The South Dakota Grassland Coalition and SDSU Extension have recognized the need to help livestock producers address these key concerns by starting with the challenge of thinking about the ranch or farm as a whole, complex, and integrated business. Therefore, the Grassland Coalition, in partnership with SDSU Extension, will be hosting a series of initial meetings in various locations across the state in the coming months. These meetings will feature producers who have successfully synchronized their calving dates to better match their overall operational management needs. Also, these meetings will serve as an opportunity to hear from producers about critical issues and questions to develop improved information and guidance for those who want to make changes in their operational structure.

Some important considerations when evaluating changes to calving dates.

1. **Evaluate the 'drivers' of your current system:** Why do you do what you do? For instance, are you calving in the March mud and snow so you can farm in April and May? If so, even if this was necessary in past years, is it still necessary today with advances in farming tools and techniques?
2. **Assessing your own need for change:** Do you have a problem? Some indicators that a problem exist could be stress, fatigue, or minimal profits. If you find yourself wondering 'how do they do it' when looking at a neighbor, it may be time to evaluate your own need for change. Perhaps the best way to assess the need for change is to engage a trusted friend and ask them to give you an honest opinion about your operational structure.
3. **Financial resources:** Is your operation unduly influenced by your banker or loan officer? If so, it may be time for change.
4. **Existing calving conditions (environmental):** Taking a step back, are you happy with the conditions you normally calve in when considering animal health/cleanliness, ground conditions, or inputs?
5. **Existing calving conditions (financial inputs):** What is your calving program costing you? Electricity, bedding, vet bills, or other overhead like machinery repairs, etc. real expenses. Can these things be avoided if you change your calving season?

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The Green Side Up Continued by Pete Bauman

6. **Existing resource limitations:** Are there structural, access, human, machinery, or land resources that significantly impact your current calving program? Are you currently expending financial or other resources to overcome these limitations? Would a change in calving dates potentially reduce or eliminate some or all of these limitations?
7. **Breeding and marketing program:** Are there marketing options/opportunities to consider that better fits your resource concerns? Would a change in breeding/calving dates allow you to capitalize on a different market or size of calf?
8. **Calving pastures:** Do you have reasonable access to existing pastures under your current calving model? Would an alternative calving date create improved opportunity for animal health and nutrition? Are you forced to consider a 'sacrifice pasture' in your grazing or calving plan? Does your fall pasture management limit your spring calving options?
9. **Managing calving pastures:** Can you adjust your operation to ensure dry, healthy, nutrient rich calving pastures?
10. **Creating calving pastures (native and non-native):** Can you adjust your land resources to create improved access to healthy calving pastures, whether native grasslands or by planting cropland in close proximity to resilient, non-invasive, permanent cover?
11. **Cow health, exercise, nutrition, calving ease:** Would there be a benefit to calving ease in your herd with improved exercise and nutrition?
12. **Human resources/labor:** Can calving at a different time reduce your labor commitment?
13. **Human health/stress/family:** Is calving stressful on your personal or family health?
14. **Plan (business plan, drought plan, or other whole-systems plan):** Have you taken a step back and evaluated your entire operation. Have you evaluated your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats? Have you considered alternative livestock that may fit your situation better?
15. **Consider what mom would do:** Mother Nature generally has things figured out. Assess when most of the native animals in your area have their young and consider the pros and cons of moving your system closer to those dates.



(Photo by NRCS)



(Photo by NRCS)

For more information on any educational events sponsored by the South Dakota Grassland Coalition, visit sdgrass.org. To register for events contact Pete Bauman 605-882-5140 peter.bauman@sdstate.edu, or Judge Jessop judge.jessop@sdconservation.net.

Pete Bauman is an Extension Range Field Specialist in Watertown, SD.

The Rangelands Partnership by Sandy Smart

This past week I attended The Rangelands Partnership annual meeting in Fargo, ND with SDSU Librarian Nancy Marshall and Extension Range Specialist Krista Ehlert. The Rangelands Partnership is a collective effort of 19 western land-grant universities collaborating with international partners who have expertise in library sciences, web design, and rangeland ecology and management. They have developed a couple of websites, Global Rangelands (<http://globalrangelands.org/>) and Rangelands West (<http://globalrangelands.org/rangelandswest/>) to compile current research, decision-making tools, and training materials for sustaining the world's rangelands. In addition, The Rangelands Partnership hosts higher education teaching materials for university and college instructors developed by the Range Science Education Council. The Rangelands Partnership has their own Youtube channel to deliver rangeland topics using video format. Their aim is to bring together into one place a "one stop shopping place" regarding all things "range". The two websites will merge this summer and become "Rangelands Gateway".

The Rangelands Partnership first initiated at the University of Arizona in 1996 by university librarians, website specialists, and range extension specialists. The goal was to use internet technologies to deliver information and provide new research and learning opportunities about rangeland science and management to increasingly connected audiences. As one of the original five institutional members of the National Agricultural Library's Agriculture Network Information Center (AgNIC) effort, the preliminary "Managing Rangelands" website was an early example of a cooperative approach to the electronic dissemination of information. However, the University of Arizona team recognized that the broad issues related to rangeland management do not stop at political boundaries. As a result, in 2001, the framework for a virtual regional rangelands stewardship initiative was presented at the Western College of Agriculture deans and directors' summer meeting. A similar presentation was made to library officials. The result was support from deans and directors to move forward on a regional effort. Concurrently, rangeland specialists and agricultural librarians also were contacted. Using this top down and bottom up approach led to the current collaboration among 13 Western land-grants and 6 Great Plains states, each with a designated range professional and librarian/IT member.

We were treated to a tour of Bonanzaville in Fargo operated by the Cass County Historical Society. We viewed buildings, tractors, cars, and trains from a bygone era. After supper, Steve Stark, a local artist and former extension agent conducted an interactive drawing of the important people that created the land-grant system and agriculture research in the US. It was a neat way to learn about our past. Thanks to Nicole Juve and Kevin Sedevic for hosting the meeting this year.



Artist Steve Stark and the members of The Rangelands Partnership in Fargo, ND May 20, 2019.

Marketing Late Spring Calves by Garnet Perman

After two consecutive snowy springs, more producers may be motivated to move calving dates from March to May. One question about making that move is how does this affect marketing those later born calves? Here's what a producer, a sale barn auctioneer and a feed lot manager had to say:

Dan Rasmussen, Belvidere, of the 33 Ranch shifted to late calving about 20 years ago. His advice is to have calves born on grass and design the rest of the ranch around it, making the most of the resources you have. For example, for their ranch, calving later meant changing genetics from a high milking cow to a more moderate milker. His advice echoes that of well known consultant Burke Teichert in the March 7, 2016 issue of Beef Magazine: "Profit per acre is far more important than profit per cow. Profit per cow can be so deceiving because of different size, milking ability, fertility, and survivability of the cows you have compared with what might be optimum or most profitable on your ranch."

The 33 Ranch uses a multi venue marketing plan. All calves born on the ranch have the potential to enter the organic market. The one and two year old heifers stay in the organic grass fed market. "Marketing in the organic market is all about relationships," said Rasmussen. The certified organic animals are usually sold one load at a time to partners in Idaho, California and Colorado from July to October. He can get carcass data back, but doesn't always request it. While carcass data can be helpful, Rasmussen said, "Your biggest return comes from efficiently utilizing ranch resources."

A decision regarding the steers is made at weaning time depending on the market. They generally go to the commodity market in October. Rasmussen sees the local sale barn as an important tool. Animals can be sold year round and relationships with order buyers and sale barn managers can be helpful. "The commodity market is a good back up plan and you have to have a back up plan!" he said. He also observed that anybody already in the yearling business would have an easy transition to late calving. "You just have to accept that they will be lighter."

Casey Perman with Mobridge Livestock utilizes later calving dates himself. In his experience the market for lighter calves headed for grass is generally steady for several weeks starting around March 1. On May 14, 1000 pound steers brought \$1300 or \$1.30 per pound while 650 pounders were \$1100 or \$1.70 per pound. Perman says the per pound price spread is typical although many factors can impact price on a given day. Does it really matter which 10 months of the year you own a calf? Lucas Sutherland, manager at Wulf Cattle in McLaughlin said, "Cattle are traded all 12 months of the year. When they're born doesn't really matter." Wulf Cattle specializes in marketing cattle that qualify for several value added programs. They are able to pay the producer \$5-10/hundredweight more than the regular market depending on the program. They purchase about 65% of their cattle directly from a ranch, which Sutherland noted lessens the stress on calves. The rest come from order buyers and a very few through the sale barn.

Auction sale barn, retained ownership (which offers a premium for management and provides carcass data), branded beef or value added programs (breed specific, company specific, and store brand), graded and pooled sales, tele-auction and video auction, private treaty are all viable options for late spring calves. Taking time to understand how different marketing options work and evaluating them based on your cost of production and available resources, such as labor, will help determine which is the most profitable for your situation.

The Grassland Coalition is offering a series of meetings about late spring calving. If you are considering changing calving dates or already calve later in the spring, something about the process can always be learned from the voices of experience. Dates and times are on the SD Grassland Coalition website.

Garnet Perman is a freelance writer and ranches with her husband, Lyle, near Lowry, SD.

2019 National Land and Range Judging by Dave Ollila



Wessington Springs 4-H Range Team 2019. L to R, President OACD, Noah Hainy, Rylie Stevens, Landon Wolter, Isaac Koulousek, Coach – Craig Shryock, Dave Ollila – SDSU Extension.

The Wessington Springs 4-H Range Team received top honors for their performance in the National 4-H Range Judging Competition held in the Oklahoma City area May 1-3 2019. 800 FFA and 4-H members competed in the National Land and Range Judging contest held May 1-3, according to the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts, the contest's principal sponsor. The Cheyenne-Arapaho agency North of El Reno, OK hosted the Range and Land judging event on May 3rd. Total registration for the event exceeded 1,000 people with coaches, sponsors, officials and group leaders in addition to the contestants.

The FFA and 4-H participating teams qualified for the national event by placing among the top five teams at contests held in their home states. The first two days of the three day event offered contestants opportunities to visit nearby practice sites to get acquainted with Oklahoma soils and plants with information available from range and soil experts. The actual contest site remains a secret until contest day, so no one has an unfair advantage. Contestants and coaches gather on contest morning to find out the official contest location.

The event ended Thursday night with an awards banquet in the Great Hall of the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. National championship trophies were awarded to team and individual winners in each category of the competition including land judging, range judging, and homesite evaluation. Each category included FFA and 4-H divisions.

In the Range Judging 4-H Competition, the Wessington Springs 4-H team brought home the National Championship! Individually, Noah Hainy was recognized as the National Champion individual followed by Rylie Stevens placing 2nd, Landon Wolter 3rd, and Isaac Koulousek placing 5th. The team was coached by Mr. Craig Shryock. The Kadoka FFA Range Judging Team placed 13th in the FFA Range division. Team members included Stephanie Ring, Luke Keegan, Kaelan Block, and Dylan Vandermay and coached by Mr. Brandy Knutson. The Meade County 4-H Land Judging team placed 4th. Team members included Hunter Eide, Randi Tivis, Lauren Fritz and Kylie Shaw. The Meade County team was coached by Ms. Brianna Larson. SD FFA Land judging teams performed well but did not make the stage.

These opportunities expose students to the study of Range and Land Management and provide students with skills and understanding of valuable natural resources that drives the economies of Rural America in the Great Plains. Many students will pursue careers which require the knowledge of soils and range resource management. Also attending to provide technical assistance included: Dr. Sandy Smart, SDSU Rangeland Management Extension Specialist, Ms. Emily Helms – USDA-NRCS State Range Conservationist, and Ms. Krista Ehlert – SDSU Extension Range Specialist.



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- News from the SD Section of the Society for Range Management

By: Sandy Smart

Who likes change? It seems few people like change, yet change is inevitable. Most of the time change is needed to adjust to structural fluctuations in the market or the environment. The business world is constantly changing. It is no different in extension, teaching, or ranching. Range Camp was started in 1976 by Rod Baumberger and later organized by Jim Johnson to teach range judging and range management concepts to high school students. The SD SRM Section has had a long-standing tradition in youth education (see March 2019 newsletter article) and Range Camp was the perfect summer opportunity to do this.



2013 Range Camp participants

The first several camps were held on private ranches near Rapid City. In the late 1970s, Range Camp was moved to Sturgis and was held at the High School and participants stayed at a local campground. This tradition was continued up until about five years ago. Unfortunately, student numbers declined such that the steering team, Tate Lantz and Dave Ollila, decided a change was needed or else they would have to discontinue offering the camp. There were probably several reasons for this decline, but one thing that Dave, former ag instructor at Newell, noticed was the increasing role high school sports have become during the summer.

Thus, Tate and Dave revamped Range Camp to include an adult section for professionals in ag lending and real estate appraising professions. The additional adults helped boost the numbers and provided a new, badly needed outreach opportunity. This year, Range Camp has morphed into the South Dakota Natural Resource Professionals Rangeland Workshop and is organized by Dr. Krista Ehlert (SDSU Extension), Matt Scott (USFS), Tanse Herrmann (NRCS), and Carmen Drieling (BLM). This year's focus is to educate and enable agencies to work cooperatively with producers and permittees to sustain and regenerate range resources. For more information visit <https://www.sdrangelands.com/south-dakota-range-camp.html>



Mitch Faulkner (NRCS) instructing Range Camp participants on how to use the grazing stick.

Rangeland Days on the other hand has been doing quite well and is the SD Section of SRM's flagship youth program. We usually have over 100 participants in the combined Rangeland and Soils Days. This year marks the 36th annual Rangeland Days and the 15th annual Soils Days. The event occurs two consecutive years in the same location and moves between West River and East River. We partner with local conservation districts to help manage logistics. This year's Rangeland Days will be in Redfield for the second year. For more information visit <https://www.sdrangelands.com/south-dakota-rangeland-days.html>

The National Land and Range Judging contest in Oklahoma City is the pinnacle of our youth's experience in land, range, or homesite judging. The SD SRM Section's Youth Endowment Committee support is crucial in providing finances for South Dakota 4H and FFA teams. Additional partner support from the SD Grassland Coalition and the SD Soil Health Coalition was welcomed this year. Funding from 4H has diminished over the years and thus a strong partnership between SD SRM, SDGC, and SDSHC is necessary. Ag teachers are critical in addition to SDSU Extension and NRCS personnel in making this competition successful. Dave Ollila will retire next February, so Krista Ehlert, Sandy Smart, and Emily Helms will help make sure it keeps going.



Sandy Smart
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Brookings, SD 57007

Calendar of Events

Event	Date	Location	Contact Person	Phone
Low Stress Livestock Handling Workshop	June 3	Mitchell	Judge Jessop	605-280-0127
SD Natural Resource Professionals Rangeland Workshop	June 4-6	Sturgis	David Ollila	605-394-1722
Annual Bird Tour	June 7-8	Mitchell	Judge Jessop	605-280-0127
Rangeland Days	June 18-19	Redfield	David Ollila	605-394-1722
Leopold Conservation Award Tour	July 16	Frankfort	Judge Jessop	605-380-0127
Grassland Management School	July 23-25	Watertown	Pete Bauman	605-882-5140

Please remit any comments, suggestions, or topics deemed necessary for further review to: Sandy Smart, SDSU Box 2170, Brookings, SD 57007, alexander.smart@sdsu.edu, (605) 688-4017