

International Affairs: A Viewpoint from Abroad

Jon M. Skovlin

This letter is in belated response to Dr. C.E. Poulton's impassioned plea, "International Affairs in Range Management: A challenge to the Society," *Rangelands* 5(6):276-278 (Dec. '83). Belated because communications are slow and irregular in reaching this bush outpost.

Dr. Poulton's call to the Society to better define our role in international range management was timely and of considerable substance. Timely, in the broad sense, because the international community of renewable natural resources, is frantically searching for solutions to arrest desertification, habitat degradation, and deforestation (including savannah grasslands).

Moreover, livestock-centered rangeland development projects for aiding Third World countries and their subsistence pastoral societies are rapidly falling into disfavor with lending institutions. The World Bank, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), etc., repeatedly see development of these marginal economies resulting in rangeland degradation. In point of fact, there are becoming more range rehabilitation assistance projects than development projects. The message, therefore, is there needs to be a lot more range management in arid and semiarid range livestock development projects.

Dr. Poulton's article was of substance because it presented some of the problems of international rangeland development, told what has been done by the committee and challenged us to respond with comments, ideas and direction. Specifically, it reviewed progress over the past few years: (a) 1981 "involvement areas," (b) 1982 "activities," and (c) 1983 "committee deliberations."

What is Wrong?

As I remember, these were the same problems, activities and deliberations in 1971, 1972, and 1973—a decade ago. In that same interval the population of the Third World has increased 50% and we still sit around proposing and deliberating. I submit there can be little action until the International Affairs Committee has an operating budget to provide the kinds of services that have been proposed over the years. Perhaps then, it is time that we went out and "beat the bush(es)" for some of the grant money being expended by the World Bank, USAID, and others who are looking for solutions and who need our services.

Alternative Solutions

Now, back to the article and its challenge. I see continuity in this committee as somewhat of a related problem to that of our dismal level of implementation. One suggestion here is to create a steering committee of senior members with terms

of up to three years. We have many colleagues who have spent their careers in rangeland development abroad—some directing large international rangeland organizations and corporations—most of them would be excited to serve in this capacity.

The steering committee members would have separate functions but, as a body, would direct 4 or 5 permanent subcommittees:

1. Educational services to provide:
 - A. A Documentation Center for
 - (i) reference material deposit and exchange
 - (ii) translations, etc.
 - B. Liaison with international rangeland institutions
 - (i) universities and training centers
 - (ii) curricula development and certification
2. Referral services to:
 - A. Contracting firms that provide technical services abroad
 - B. Sponsors and assistance donors
 - C. Individuals who have range management skills needed by A and B (above)
 - (i) consultants, including Third World nationals
 - (ii) young SRM professionals (associates)
 - (iii) Peace Corps
 - (iv) returned foreign students
 - D. Institutions (public and private) that provide rangeland services from high tech, i.e., NASA, to low tech, i.e., CAT
3. Membership information services and publicity for:
 - A. Newsletters and circulars
 - B. Meetings and symposium/workshops
 - C. SRM chapter formulation
4. Finance
 - A. Grantsmanship
 - B. Accounting and budgets

Another Way Out

Failing this kind of an internal organization, an equally effective solution to our level of action dilemma would be for those members who are really dedicated to international rangeland affairs to formulate a subsidiary society affiliated with SRM. This has recently been accomplished from within the Society of American Foresters in the form of the International Society of Tropical Foresters which has become an active service-oriented group directed to solutions to Third World problems.

This form of organization, however, has the effect of syphoning off talent and resources that might otherwise be available to other SRM activities. I believe, never the less, that

in a matter of time this latter group will evolve if nothing is done to dispel the inertia in international range management affairs of our Society.

The choice is still ours. What do you think?

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Editor's Note: The author is a range consultant, presently with Winrock International in Makindu, Kenya. As part of the review process I asked Larry D. White, Chairman of the International Affairs Committee, SRM, for his thoughts on the paper. Larry's comments follow.

COMMENT

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I have read Jon's letter with much interest and generally concur with his conclusions. Again he is making suggestions. What we need now is to act. That is why we are taking that first step by organizing the International Rangeland Development Symposium for February 1985 at Salt Lake

City. I hope this will serve as the nucleus for bringing the internationally concerned range professionals together. Hopefully in 3-4 years we can initiate a Journal of International Rangeland Development by subscription only. Through this media we should promote country or continent organization of Range Management Organizations since most people in developing countries (especially) cannot afford SRM membership.

Thus, SRM can become truly international by helping others meet their local range needs. At present very little in the journals or at the annual meeting can help a developing country range professional. As Jon put it, if SRM fails to meet the need, then another organization will evolve to fill the niche.

As chairman of the 1984 SRM International Affairs Committee, I hope each range professional will support these efforts. It is important for North American Range Management to learn from the rest of the world and share with others.

Are other countries outcompeting us in development of rangeland technology and application? Are we happy to remain isolated from outside knowledge? Why have New Zealand, Australia, and South African developments suddenly become the rage among U.S.A. ranchers? We need to be challenged by everyone's experience to keep ourselves innovative. We cannot learn if we do not establish a means of effectively communicating worldwide.

The International Affairs Committee needs your support.

Research Shows Consumers Prefer "Prime" Steaks

Consumers heavily favor major marbling when faced with a choice between major or minor marbling in their beef steaks, a Texas A&M University (TAMU) research study shows. The study has major implications for the cattle industry, says Dr. Robert E. Branson of Texas A&M.

"It (the study) is telling us eating quality increased as marbling increased. This raises a caution flag for the industry. It had better be careful as it goes toward lean beef or take the chance of chasing away the people who like better quality," Branson said.

He also cautioned that it would be false to assume all beef eaters are the same. "We may have two markets for beef and if we're going to maximize sales, we must emphasize both types in all stores," he said.

A second study seeking information of consumer preferences from a buying standpoint is in the pilot stage, Branson said.

The initial phase of research was conducted in Houston, San Francisco, Kansas City and Philadelphia. A report on the project was delivered to the Beef Industry Council of the National Live Stock and Meat Board at the board's annual meeting in Lexington, Ky.

Of the steak lovers in the four cities, Philadelphians place the highest value on marbling. A consumer taste panel there gave their highest scores to steaks grading USDA Low Prime. Second preference was shown for the High Choice grade.

Test participants in San Francisco, Kansas City and Houston also gave the Low Prime steaks their highest rating. However, their scores were uniformly lower than those in Philadelphia.

The research measured mainly eating quality. Some information was gathered on preferences according to levels of age, education and income. Panelists were also asked about their buying preferences.

The TAMU study was a cooperative venture involving the Texas Agricultural Market Research and Development Center, an education and research service of the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station and the Texas Agricultural Extension Service.

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