

Rancher Short Course in the Osage

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Successful ranching requires many skills along with range management. Having a successful ranching operation is a personal thing and can mean different things to people, depending upon their values and goals. In June of 1991, twenty ranchers met near Pawuska, Oklahoma, in a workshop to enhance their skills for making their ranches more successful.

The workshop was the idea of Oklahoma ranchers Wally Olson and Dick Hamilton. Wally, who ranches in northeastern Oklahoma, and Dick, in the western part of the state, had both seen ranches and ranch employees fail to reach their full potential. Citing one instance, a rancher had developed a grazing plan without the cooperation or understanding of the ranch hands who would be actually doing the work. This resulted in failure. The grazing plan was not technically wrong, but the cooperation, understanding and motivation to allow it to work were not there. The important step of seeing the operation from the eyes of each employee was missing.

Their vision resulted in the workshop. This was a joint effort between the Rangeland Improvement Committee of the Oklahoma Cattleman's Association and the Oklahoma Chapter of the Society for Range Management. In the planning process, several factors were identified as causes of why range management programs break down.

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The "Osage" region of northeastern Oklahoma has long been noted as excellent rangeland for cattle. It also served as the setting for a rancher workshop in June of 1991.

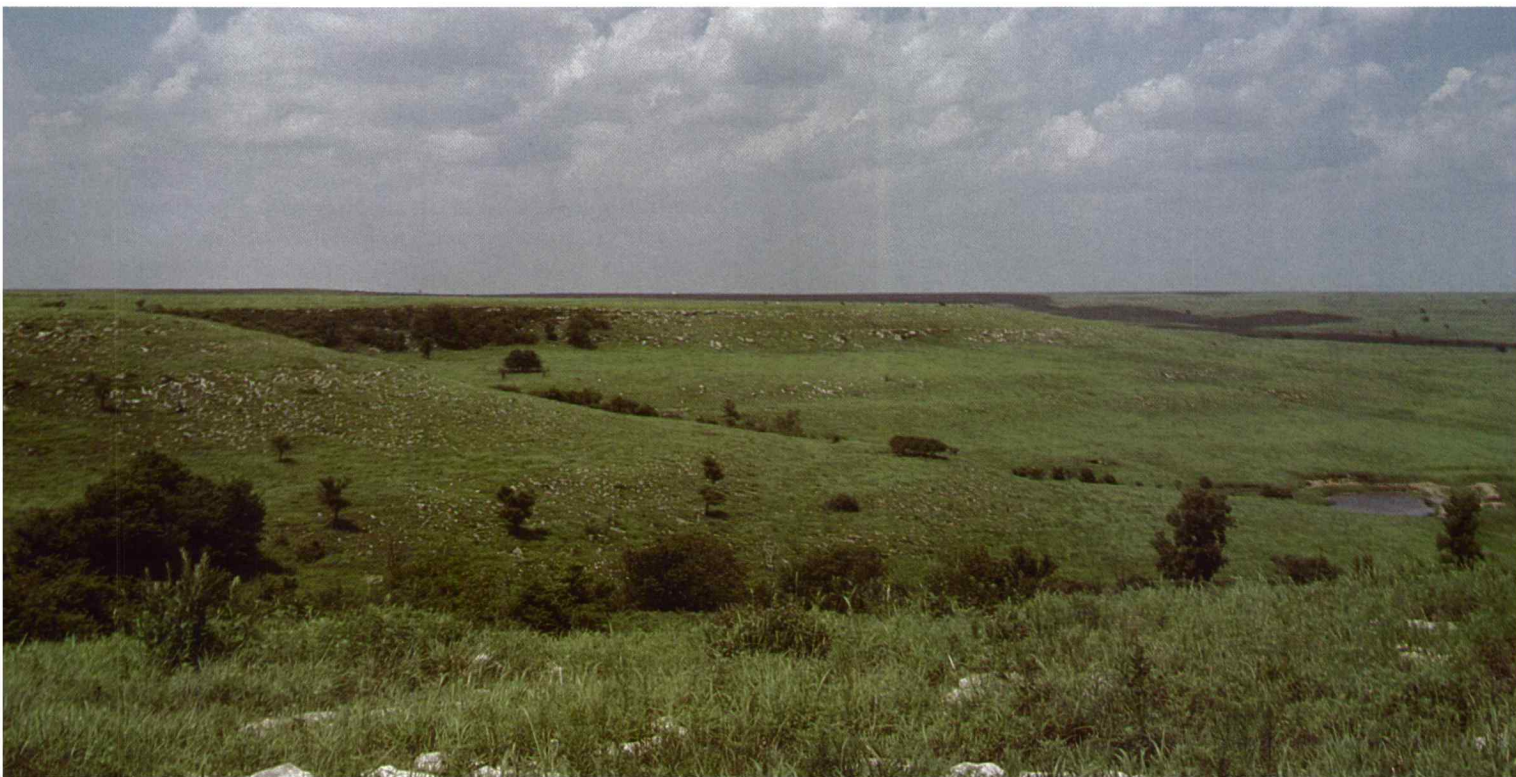
Some have nothing to do with range management knowledge. Instead, range management efforts sometime fail because ranch owners, managers and ranch hands do not:

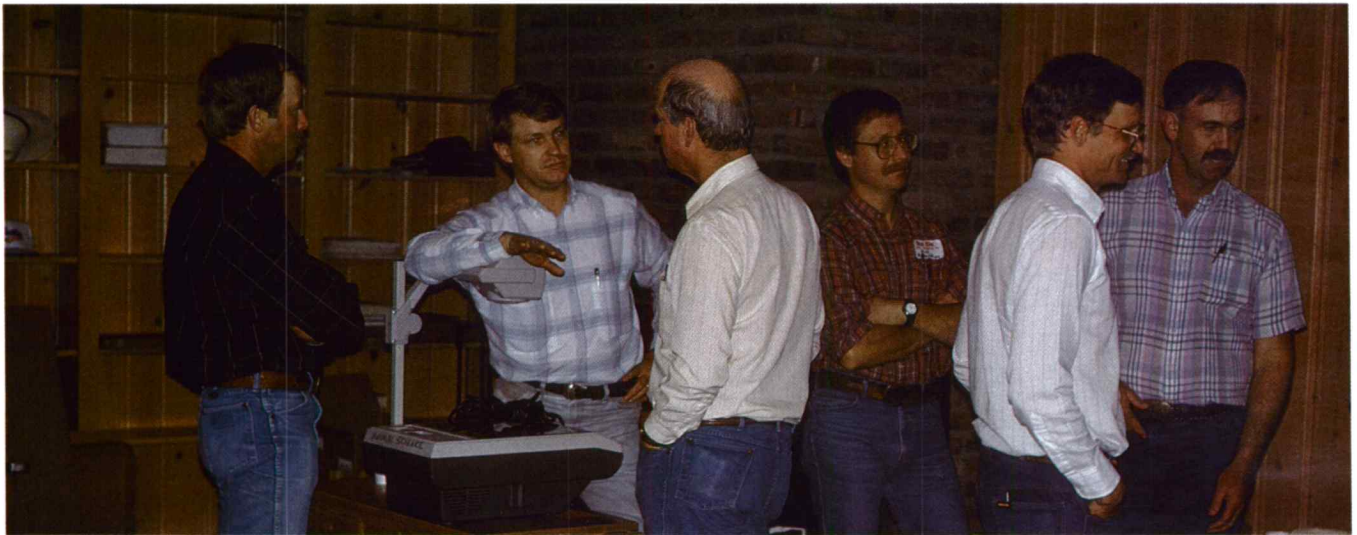
1. Know what is expected of them,
2. Understand the principles behind the management program,
3. Share common goals and visions,
4. Communicate well,
5. Have the proper training,
6. Have good reference libraries or know who to call for help.

This workshop was designed as a "why things happen" workshop, with special emphasis of fostering communications among the ranch personnel. The goal was to ensure that each person on the ranch staff shares in the ranch goals and knows how the range program works for the management to be successful.

The invitees were from ranches in the "Osage" country of northeastern Oklahoma. For a ranch to participate, they were to bring the owner, manager, foreman, and cowboys. This way, each would be hearing the same presentations and each would feel more a part of the ranch "team" through individual participation.

One unique approach was that the discussion topics were not pre-set. The instructors wanted to know what was important from the ranchers' perspective. What did





Dr. Ted McCollum, animal science professor from Oklahoma State University discusses cattle nutrition with a local rancher. On the far right is Wally Olson, one of the workshop originators.

they need to know to do their job better, and what barriers prevented them from achieving their goals?

The agenda was set through a group participation process at the beginning of the workshop. Following introductions and explaining the course goals, each participant was given the opportunity and responsibility of identifying subjects that would help them do a better job on the ranch. There were no right or wrong subjects, only issues. Here are some items the group wanted to know more about:

1. Plant identification
2. How plants grow
3. The role of different kinds of plants in ranching
4. Weed control economics
5. Plant ecology
6. Brush control
7. Hunting and recreation on rangeland
8. Grazing systems
9. Hay production
10. Goal setting
11. Range condition determinations
12. Judging utilization
13. Forage budgeting
14. Use of introduced plants
15. Nutrition
16. How to share ideas
17. Evaluating range trends
18. Plant succession
19. Range sites
20. Multiple use of rangeland

Joining the group to help with some of the instruction were Soil Conservation Service range conservationists, an Extension Range Specialist and an Animal Scientist from Oklahoma State University. Members of the ranching group also greatly contributed to those subjects where they had knowledge and experience.

Pete Jackson, former SRM Executive Vice-President, helped to focus the group by clarifying roles and expecta-

tions. "The ranching community should take the leadership in developing their own plans. I consider the agencies and universities as 'partners' in my Montana operation. I want to go to them with my plan and say, 'Help me get my plan to work'. It is the ranchers' privilege and responsibility to make decisions, and the public agencies' responsibility to provide the needed technical help and research support."

The setting was informal. The workshop started at noon and ended at noon on the next day.

The Sooner Land and Cattle Company graciously offered their bunkhouse, which had sleeping quarters and enough space to hold discussions. With attendance limited to 20, group discussion was good. Especially entertaining was the discovery of a "story teller" among the group who kept the group laughing until late at night with tales of roping hogs, bulls in the lake, and rounding up buffalo. (Fun and fellowship are important!) Meals were outstanding.

All the identified subjects were discussed with as much of the presentation as possible done on the rangeland to show the principles involved. To the extent practical, all presentations were in a discussion format instead of a lecture. In addition to the instruction, reference materials in the form of fact sheets and publications were made available. A registration fee of \$50.00 was charged to cover meal expense and publications. This also gave the participants something to take home for additional study.

Course evaluations were positive. Because of the success, a Second Annual Course of 3 days was held in June in the southern part of the state. With a one-day period, coverage of some subjects was brief in the original course.

The key ingredient is a couple of ranchers willing to develop the idea, make the arrangements, put a hand on peoples' shoulders, look them in the eye, and say, "Let's do it."