

# Winkelman Natural Resource Conservation District Field Day

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I live on the flying U W, our family cattle ranch north of Tucson, Arizona, which was started in the late 1870's by my great grandfather, F. A. Meyer.

In the spring of 1986, my older sister's fifth grade class visited the ranch and participated in branding baby calves. The day was a great success, but it became obvious to us that the young people, as well as their parents and teachers, knew very little about natural resources and the people who work on the land. We decided to start a ranch field day that would expose the students to many facets of natural resource management and enable them to interact with professionals and technical people who are involved in the management of our rangelands. Through the years, the field day has evolved into the Winkelman Natural Resource Conservation District Ranch Day. The District is a major sponsor, along with the Haydon Combe Ranch, owned by our neighbor and cousin Patricia Haydon. Every year volunteers from the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), University of Arizona (U of A), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Forest Service (USFS), Arizona State Land Department (ASLD), Plant Material Center (PMC), Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD), Magma Copper Company, the Mercer family of the Campstool Ranch along with other district ranchers, volunteer as instructors and aides. This spring will mark the ninth year that we have hosted the ranch field day.

**Editor's Note:** This is the First Place winner of the High School Youth Forum technical papers contest at the SRM Winter Annual Meeting in Phoenix, Arizona, Jan. 1995.

The field day is designed for sixth graders. Over the years we have developed a booklet for the students to use as a guide through the field day. Each student receives a booklet to review in class and take home.

Each spring, usually in April or May, around 100 students board school

and the rules for the day. They then break into seven groups and rotate through seven training stations. These stations include: Plant Identification, Brands and Animal Health, Wildlife, Soils, Range Etiquette, Land Status, and Tools of the Rancher. My sisters and I, as well as other family mem-



buses for the thirty mile trip over mostly dirt road to the James Corral near the ranch headquarters. Volunteers ride the buses to describe the trip and the different land and vegetational changes along the way. They travel through riparian areas of the Gila and San Pedro rivers, through Sonoran desert shrub, up to desert grassland, and Arizona interior chaparral.

After their arrival, the students are given a brief orientation, introductions,

and the rules for the day. They then break into seven groups and rotate through seven training stations. These stations include: Plant Identification, Brands and Animal Health, Wildlife, Soils, Range Etiquette, Land Status, and Tools of the Rancher. My sisters and I, as well as other family mem-

bers, work at the different stations as needed and are responsible for the corral work which comes later in the day. At each station every student gets a chance to interact with the instructor, ask questions, participate and touch. When every station is completed by all of the students, we break for lunch.

Now the fun begins! The students are given the opportunity to participate in branding small calves. Small groups



of children are instructed in the proper use of ropes, piggin strings, and other branding equipment. They are then allowed to rope and tie down, vaccinate, brand, dehorn, earmark, and castrate the calves. The children are closely supervised by adults who answer the many questions generated by this exciting activity. Every student gets a chance to participate.

When the work is done, the new ranch hands board the buses to head back to school loaded down with their trophies of cut ears, horns, and scrotum sacks. By the end of the day, everybody, student and volunteer alike, is tired but hopefully we've all learned something new.

We have always wondered if the students learned anything and how much they will remember through time. We are always looking for ways to improve the field day and make it more interesting. Therefore, I decided to undertake a study to measure our successes and learn where improvements are needed. I conducted a survey of students who have gone through the program. I hoped to determine if the students remembered the different training stations and what they most remembered.

I randomly selected four students, two boys and two girls, from each grade seven through twelve. I interviewed each student using the same questions, and I was careful not to prompt them or help them in any way. The questions I asked in my survey were:

1. How often do you think about the field day?
2. What did you learn from the field day?
3. What was the most interesting part of the field day?
4. Did the field day help you understand how to care for and respect our natural resources?
5. Did the field day open your mind or interest you in careers in natural resources or agriculture?
6. Do you remember how knowledgeable the instructors were about the topics they taught?
7. Do you have any suggestions about other topics that could be included in the program?

For each of these questions, the responses were compared between each grade and between boys and girls. Depending on the question, comparisons of responses were made between each training station.

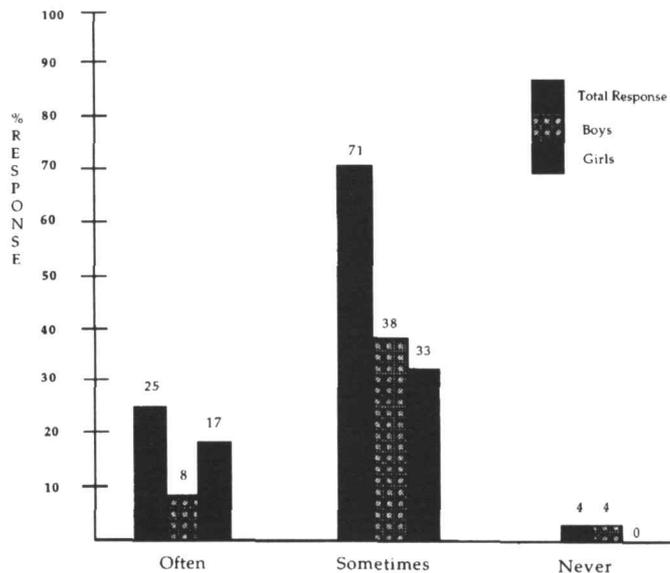


Fig. 1. Percentage of students who think about their field day experience.

The results of the survey were interesting and showed that the students usually recalled most of the training stations. The twelfth grade students, even after six years, had about the same recall as did the seventh grade students. Figure 1 shows that the majority of the students think of the field day sometimes and 25% of them often do, and that there was very little difference between boys and girls.

Forty-two percent of the students stated that they learned most about branding (Figure 2). Twenty-nine percent of those were girls and only 13% were boys. Next to branding, they stated that they learned most about ranching, followed by plant identification and soils. Only 4% of the students I questioned stated that they learned most about wildlife.

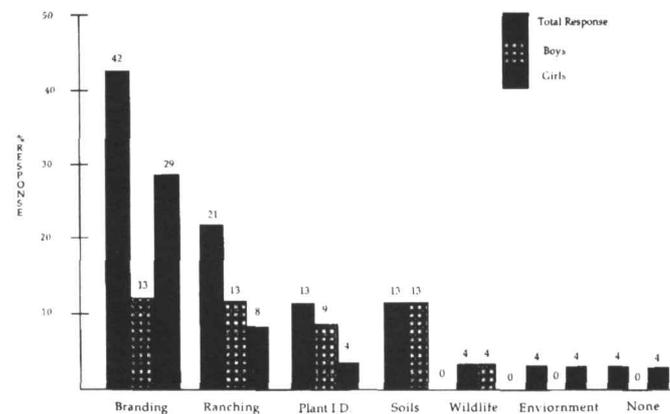


Fig. 2. Percent response of what the students learned the most about during the field day.

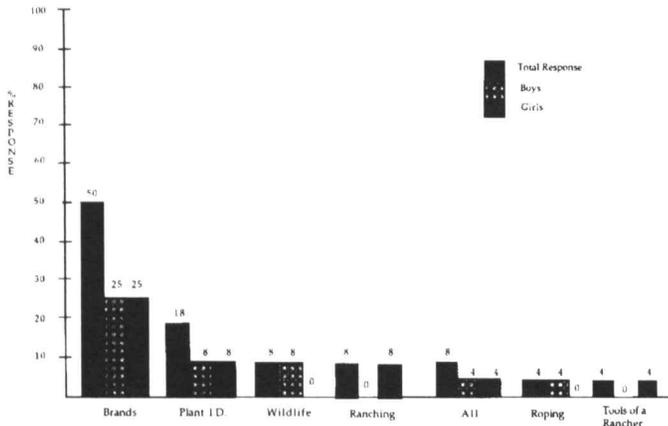


Fig. 3. The Percentage of student response to the most interesting subject.

This was a rather surprising result because we expected youth to enjoy wildlife since it is a hands-on station and one with a lot of participation.

Fifty percent of the students found branding the most interesting (Figure 3). The response of the girls and the boys was the same. Plant identification was second most popular followed by wildlife, ranching, and all events.

The student's responses to having a better knowledge of the many careers in natural resources and agriculture, remembering the instructors, and having more respect for our natural resources and environment were about the same for the boys as for the girls (Figure 4). Sixty-three percent answered "yes" to having more knowledge and consideration for natural resource careers. Eighty-four per-

cent of the students responded that they remembered how knowledgeable the instructors were about the topics they taught.

Finally, 96% of the students said that they liked the program as it was and thought that we covered everything fairly well.

In conclusion, I found it interesting that all the students remembered the different training stations regardless of how long it had been since they had gone through the program and that girls had as much interest, sometimes more, as boys. At least one-fourth of the students interviewed thought about the field day often.

The hands-on portions of the field day, including ranching, plant identification, and soils were the training stations that the students most remembered and felt that they learned most about. The students' interests were stirred in natural resources and natural resource careers. Training stations such as land status and rangeland etiquette need improvement. Perhaps this can be partly accomplished by improvements in the rangeland booklet.

I had fun conducting this survey and found that the information I gathered was interesting and in one instance surprising. The results of the survey will help us improve our program. In the eight years we have conducted this field day hundreds of girls and boys have been exposed to the natural resources of this area and the people who use and manage them.

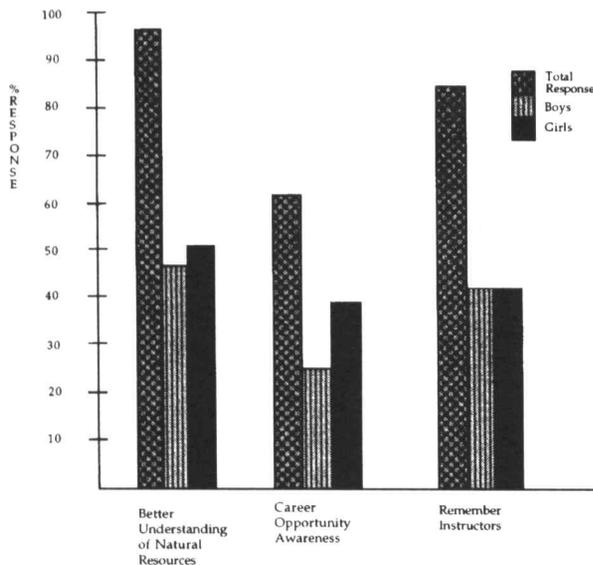


Fig. 4. Percent student response to questions about understanding of Natural Resources, career opportunities, and their recall of instructors.