

One Ranch Family's Adaptation to Changing Resource Demands and Social Values

GORDON STANLEY

Highlight: *Southwest Oregon was quite primitive when Mr. Stanley's grandfather began ranching there in 1880. Grazing was the primary use of the land, and the pioneer ranchers resented all government regulation. When Stanley and his brother took over in the 1940's they began to feel the pressure of increased demands on the land. Recently they actively participated in the development of the Big Butte Coordinated Management Plan involving federal grazing land, private timber company land and their base property. Through this type of planning their grazing is planned so as to avoid conflict with other uses and to enhance some uses.*

Ninety-four years ago my grandfather established the family in the business of raising meat. At the same time he developed a land usage philosophy that was to guide the operation for 60 years to come. He had to take into consideration the scarcity of money (which has continued over the years), the difficulty of producing hay, and the necessity of having enough feed for the cattle year-round. Not only the cattle would eat, but so would his family. Thus his use, and in some years, his overuse, of the land was a direct economic necessity.

For the next 60 years our business, then run by my father and my uncles, followed the basic tenets laid down by grandfather. With the coming of mechanization, however, they were able to develop the land, particularly patented land, with their goal, of course, to produce more pounds of meat per acre of land.

In my grandfather's time the population of the Rogue River Valley, just north of the California border in

The author is a cattle rancher, Eagle Point, Oregon.

The paper was presented at the annual meeting, Society for Range Management, Tucson, Arizona, February 1974.

Manuscript received March 23, 1974.

southwestern Oregon, was small. So quite naturally there were few users of the land and consequently plenty of land for all. By contrast, in the late 1940's when my brother and I took over the business, the population had doubled many times over. No longer was there enough land for everyone to use for a single purpose. The pressure was already beginning to build for multiple uses of land formerly used only for grazing cattle. Timber production was rapidly becoming big business. This meant roads into land never easily accessible before. Hunting and fishing were no longer for sheer necessity. Now they were sports with many participants. Other recreations, such as camping, boating, hiking and the like, were growing by leaps and bounds. Then too, as the population grew, the watershed was of increasing importance. Each of these groups pulled for its goals with the cattlemen where he had always been, but now it was smack dab in the middle of progress.

We felt the pressure of these stepped-up demands on the land and yet still another on which our economic security directly hinged. We could no longer continue to operate and support our families with the small bunch of cattle that had carried the family in years past. We just had to expand to stay in business. That meant more cow units and more land. While we were expanding, we developed a sensitivity to criticism and a growing awareness of one clear fact: if we hoped to continue to use the land, we had to develop a more viable system, allowing for our use without interfering with other uses and at the same time develop more and better forage.

Any and all government regulation in my grandfather's time was met with reluctant compliance and deep resentment by nearly all of those highly individualistic pioneer ranchers. Times have changed and so have we. Now we actively are involved with planning and writing controls that we can live and work with without hesitancy and ire.

From this approach evolved the "Big Butte" coordinated management plan. Besides the Stanley brothers, the planners include two other ranchers who also run on our range, two timber companies—Medford Corporation and Boise-Cascade Corporation—the Oregon State Wildlife Commission, the U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and the Soil Conservation Service. The plan itself incorporates 140,000 acres of varying types of ownership and management.

All aspects of the land and its usage were studied and evaluated to determine where conflicts existed and where improvements were needed. On the basis of this evaluation, a superior type of grazing system was implemented.

One resulting change in our favor, we believe, is the flexible entry date as opposed to the fixed date. Now we are allowed access to rangeland according to feed and conditions. Already we have seen improvement, even in a very dry year, in the condition of our cattle. We are sure, too, that we will soon see improvement in range conditions.

Because of this planning, we are now in a position to do more in the way of range improvement than before possible. In this first year of implementation, for instance, we have done more in the way of fencing and water development than would have been normal over a 5-year period. As a result of this plan, we have initiated a system whereby we can plant grass in timber-producing areas, greatly enhancing the forage without adversely affecting timber production. On the slope of a porous volcanic mountain, we have developed three watering ponds to service a grazing area never used before for lack of water. The list of additional improvements for completion in the near future is long, but all parties are enthusiastic and anxious to finish as soon as possible on a priority basis.

An added plus to the working of the plan is the total cooperation of all those involved. We had a reasonably good relationship with the various agencies before, but I believe cooperation and understanding has greatly improved. Participant reaction has been tremendous, with each one giving just a little instead of pulling for its own course. The timber companies and ranchers both agreed to give consideration to an enhanced environment for the wildlife on their lands. In the past, the production of timber was the only point of concentration for the timber companies with little thought for range. Our attitude for years toward game and wildlife has been one of tolerance because we could do nothing else. Our thinking has changed as a result of this plan. We instituted a method for the manipulation of feed, water, and other factors to manage the deer herds as we would manage our cattle.

The plan is working and has caused us to continue to broaden our outlook. Still another outgrowth of this type of overall planning was the

leasing of a ranch in the milder climate of California for our cattle to winter on. This move will have a dramatic effect to the betterment of our entire operation.

Aesthetically, we have always been concerned about what our total effect on the land will be. It is our sincere hope that when we have had our day the land will be undepleted and unscarred. I would hope that our properly planned use can help us to accomplish our end, that of helping to feed a demanding society, while also improving conditions for all the other demands put on the land.

The demise of the family-type operation, because the younger generation sees no future in most agricultural fields, is becoming an increasing concern. In order to save our way of life for our children and make it feasible for them to continue, we, the cattlemen, must take the initiative. A progressive attitude in our time may have an effect on whether or not they will continue. The land must be productive and available for grazing use tomorrow, as well as today, so that they will have a reasonable chance to achieve economic security. It is my belief that this type of coordinated planning and management can give more security of tenure than anything done so far. While there are many uncertain variables in the economics of the cattle business, the asset of a well-planned and managed range is the key factor to keeping a ranch solvent.

As a consequence of my changing attitudes, I strongly feel that it is imperative that we publicize to the greatest degree the efforts and results of these efforts that have been made in planning and management of grazing lands. There are two groups, or publics, we need to reach. First, there are all others who graze the land and are not now involved in good practices with the aim of immediately enlisting their efforts in a proper direction. The second group is the general public, in particular the concerned environmentalists who are now so intense in their efforts to eliminate grazing from public lands.

The public does have the right to know how the public land is being managed. We need to tell and show these people that the land can be managed in such a way as to insure its retaining productive capability, its cover and wildlife habitats, its scenic, recreational and aesthetic values and still produce adequate supplies of red meat for the demanding consumer.

