

# Extension Practices for Range Management at Abilene Christian College, Abilene, Texas

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**R**ANGE Management as a science is coming into its own. The unqualified success of the American Society of Range Management and the publishing of the Journal of Range Management are proof. Many other publications and research studies have been inaugurated, not as agronomy, forestry, or animal husbandry, but in the name of range management itself. This recognition of range management as a science makes it imperative that an educational program between research and the rancher be carried out. The interpretation of the results of experiments and studies by these range technicians, that is, their translation into terms understood by the average rancher, requires a range man thoroughly schooled in technical knowledge, and also one who has had a wealth of practical experience.

It is true, to a certain degree, that we are short of range men who are adequately trained to fully understand and to correlate the problems of the range that confront the rancher. In the past few years, however, a few of our Western agricultural schools have turned out men who are technically trained. Unless these men come from ranch homes, they usually need some field experience to succeed in an extension program in range

management. This practical experience can be readily gained by working in the field with the Soil Conservation Service and other governmental agencies engaged in range management and studies. A range man with this background will then be in a position to carry a successful educational program to farmers and ranchers.

The Agriculture Department of Abilene Christian College found that the ranchers in Central West Texas were eager to produce more pounds of beef, mutton, and wool while at the same time improving their grasslands. Livestock producers were stimulated to investigate more fully some of these concepts by reading popular articles in newspapers and livestock magazines about progressive ranchers already putting into practice some of the newer developments of grassland research. This Agriculture Department received numerous inquiries asking for information on range work. With this basis and incentive a Division of Range Management was established in the fall of 1948. This program was devoted to the development of an educational program for ranchers in Central West Texas. A curriculum in range management was also initiated for students wanting a major in this field. Over 90 percent of these students are returning to their farms and ranches schooled in the theories and trained in the practices used for the best management of our grasslands. These students are in a position to aid and encourage neighboring ranchers with their range problems.

The first step in developing a range extension program was taken through contact with the local Soil Conservation Districts. A plan was developed to work in cooperation with the U. S. Soil Conservation Service technicians assisting these districts. Materials and information used by the Soil Conservation Service to assist ranchers with their range problems was obtained so that complete harmony existed. To do otherwise would only confuse the ranchers and objectives would be lost.

Visits to the various ranches are made upon request from the rancher, and at his convenience. Follow-up trips are always made, as one visit is never sufficient to determine all of the rancher's problems. Unless these follow-up trips are made by the range specialist, then some basic concepts are usually lost. It is essential that several trips be made even though they may be over a period of years.

Visits to these various ranches are always stimulating to both the rancher and the technician. The extension man needs to be alert at all times to observe new practices that might be of value elsewhere. In dealings with the average rancher the range manager needs to be able to speak a rancher's language, that is, either avoid the use of technical terms or carefully explain their meaning. This is particularly true about the use of plant names. Local common names should be used at all times. With range specialists practicing this rule, common plant names would become more standardized. This is one example of the need for the range manager to correlate practical experience with technical information.

The range specialist must constantly keep abreast of the trend in the latest developments, and be able to give the rancher the most accepted and proven methods for his locality. Many ranchers

are well read, and they may sometimes question certain recommended practices used at a previous date. The extension man must be equally up to date on his reading and follow even more closely the latest results of proven research and practical experiences in his field. The ability to interpret technical knowledge into simplified form to give to the rancher is a fundamental factor in the success or failure of an extension program.

A knowledge of the surrounding range types and the most accepted practices for any given area, are both important factors to be considered. At times it is necessary to talk to a rancher about land holdings in different sections of the state.

The most effective method of extension work at Abilene Christian College has been the monthly publication of the *Farm Visitor*. This paper, supported by the business firms of Abilene, is distributed to 12,000 farmers and ranchers as a public service. Mailing lists were secured from the Soil Conservation Districts in the Abilene trade territory. This publication has been well received, and a closer relationship between the land owners and the range specialist has been realized.

Since the establishment of the *Farm Visitor* in March, 1949, emphasis has been placed on the importance of range lands and their correct management. This has been the theme of this extension publication, and articles pertaining to range management have been included in each issue. These articles have not been technical in any way, but have simply told the story of some successful rancher and his range program. Both cattle and sheep raisers were visited and their methods described. The vegetation types, carrying capacity, watering and salting facilities, deferred and rotational grazing systems, reseeded areas, brush problems, and management practices

in general were items included in the story. Counties in a 150-mile radius of Abilene were covered, and articles about ranchers in Taylor, Callahan, Coleman, Shackelford, Palo Pinto, Kimble, and Reagan Counties have already been written. After each publication, new mailing lists have been received, indicating that the rancher wants to know more about the management of his grassland.

It is pertinent at this point to mention other publications dealing with extension practices, such as the magazine *Soil Conservation*, published by the U. S. Soil Conservation Service. Sections of the Society of Range Management publish news letters about latest research findings in their areas. Notable among these is the Wyoming Section which publishes a monthly news issue of range management and distributes it to members and ranchers in the state. Private business, too, has been conducting educational programs in range management for the farmer and rancher. For example, Swift & Company has published information about grassland management in their advertisements in leading newspapers and agricultural magazines throughout the country.

Another successful approach now in use by Abilene Christian College is a series of weekly fifteen-minute radio programs. The time is donated by six radio stations which cover a wide portion of western Texas. These stations are KWKC, Abilene; KGKL, San Angelo; KCRS, Midland; KDWT, Stamford; KSTB, Breckenridge; and KORC, Mineral Wells. Members of the Agriculture Department conduct these programs, and range technicians of the Soil Conservation Service, County Agents, and other agricultural leaders participate as guests. A portion of the program is always devoted to some phase of range management and gives the radio audience latest de-

velopments and actual practices in this field.

Future ranchers, including FFA and 4-H club members, should not be neglected. In order to give these boys the training they will need as successful ranchers and good range managers, Abilene Christian College, in cooperation with the Middle Clear Fork and Central Colorado Soil Conservation Districts, sponsors an annual range plant identification contest. James Hill, an FFA member from Mozelle High School, Fisk, Texas, made a perfect score of 300 on this contest in 1950. With the training of such boys as this we know that our grasslands will be in safe hands in future years.

The American Society of Range Management is advancing the educational program by including ranchers in its membership. This is somewhat unique among professional societies. Other organizations could well follow this example. Many ranchers are taking an active part in the Society, helping to bridge the gap between research and actual ranch operations.

In conclusion, findings from observations and experiences of an educational range program at Abilene Christian College disclose that a range extension specialist needs to correlate the different phases of range management. The ability to talk the rancher's language and the avoidance of technical terms are aids to a successful program. Popular articles, published in an extension bulletin, dealing with the practices of progressive ranchers make the most successful approach. This method renders a public service which is appreciated by the farmers and ranchers. Full cooperation between existing agencies devoted to the improvement of our grasslands is an essential if efficiency is to be attained. Radio programs distribute information

to urban as well as rural communities. Range plant identification contests are stimulating to the ranchers of tomorrow. These contests help young men secure a fundamental knowledge of range management.

Any institution or agency, be it fed-

eral, state, or privately endowed that is working in the field of range management, can develop an extension program by following these fundamental rules and procedures. Such an institution or agency should do this as a public service to the community which it serves.



#### SCIENCE IN A DEMOCRACY

In a democracy, the critical decisions must never become the province of "specialists". But in order to decide with wisdom, all the people in a democracy must be equipped to evaluate facts and relate them to basic principles. . . . For from now on, the citizen will be called upon constantly to make decisions which may mean life or death for the scientific enterprise. An ignorant citizenry could—and may—easily wreck that enterprise or stunt its growth unless scientists turn their attention outward from their laboratories to their communities.

Dr. Earl James McGrath  
*in* The Scientific Monthly  
August 1950