

Range Management— Generalists and Specialists

I would like to comment on Jack F. Hooper's funereal gem, "Leave Six for Pallbearers" in the July, 1968, issue (JRM 21(4):273).

This is not the first time that the future of the profession had been questioned. And the fact that it is not the first time means that the "Viewpoint" will draw no reaction from some and from others the reaction that Hooper is simply another one of those fellows yelling "wolf." Some will be irritated but not enough, unfortunately, to stifle a yawn and face the question that Dr. Hooper raises.

The future of any profession depends on (1) the *need* for its services and (2) the *ability* of its members to serve that need.

There is no question about the need for our profession. While we can expect improving agronomic techniques, irrigation and other advances in land use to reduce the acreage of land unsuited to regular cultivation, it is highly unlikely that the overall reduction from the present rangeland acreage will be significant. In addition there are still uncultivated areas of the United States and other countries where the skills and science of range management have not been applied. There is the *need*.

But does the profession have the *ability* to serve the need? I think Dr. Hooper senses the possibility that as a profession we are lacking to some degree this ability. I think he senses that, even worse, we are not improving this ability at the rate required to serve the needs of society. The only alternative to improvement is deterioration and "the garbage can."

While I doubt that the situation is as serious as Dr. Hooper infers, I think it is serious enough that we ought to be looking at our profession with something less than complacency. We need to look at our "philosophy of range management," not in terms of revising a few definitions for the Glossary, but in terms of the activities and training of the members of the profession. This point is particularly appropriate in light of the current emphasis on broadened training in renewable natural resources (RNR).

I would like to advance the thesis, in spite of the RNR emphasis, that such malaise as presently afflicts the profession comes largely from *under-specialization*. We have permitted and promoted ourselves to be classified, almost to a man, as individuals capable of handling *all* the problems of range management. A few examples may clarify this thesis.

Can any group of us meeting in the lobby of the convention hotel point to *that* man going up the stairs as a recognized authority in some particular facet of the profession? Only rarely. If we point at all, it is usually to say disparagingly, "There goes Joe Q. He's nuts on (subject)."

Another example. How many staff members in range management faculties would profess *not* to be able to teach practically any course in range management listed in the catalog? We professors would hate to admit that we weren't pretty darn good at everything that comes under the heading of range management!

Do we look at some two or three persons as standing clearly above others in their competence in grazing management systems? Hardly. We all pride ourselves on our ability to knock out some sort of a system for anybody, anytime. The consequence is, as Hooper points out, that we haven't progressed as we should have in the last 50 years.

We can ask the same question for inventories, seeding, nutrition, etc. We might pick out a man who seems to have a bit more expertise in the nutritional aspect of range management than others based on his publication record, but if we question him about his current research activities we likely will find he is involved in seeding, habitat types, and the ecology of species Z.

On the other hand, if we want help in soil classification we would insist on talking to a soil classification specialist, not just anybody from the Soils Department. If we tried to question the soil physicist, he'd likely tell us point blank that he couldn't help us.

If we wanted some help on nutritional requirements of beef cattle, we'd not talk to just anyone in the Animal Husbandry Department. We'd insist on seeing a nutritionist, or even more,

a nutritionist who specializes in beef cattle.

We have admitted the validity of specialization in other spheres of scientific activity, but for ourselves we have insisted on broad mediocrity. Admittedly there are several levels of mediocrity, but it is still mediocrity.

There have been three primary consequences of this attitude:

- (1) Teaching is too often mediocre, and on occasion nearly unprofessional. As a consequence we turn out generalists who are simply lower on the mediocrity scale than the teachers.
- (2) Research has tended to be superficial because most researchers have dabbled in too wide a variety of projects to be able to dig deeply into any one subject.
- (3) Advice to the rancher, the county agent and the public land manager has been inadequate for the demands and needs of management.

Do I plead for every person in the profession to have special excellence in some aspect of range management? Not at all. The range management generalist is a valuable and essential person in getting the range management job done. But the generalist cannot do his job as well as he should without the backing of a cadre of highly competent specialists to answer specific questions, solve particular problems and teach the most valid thought and methods in their respective specialties.

The problem in range management is not too much specialization. It is too little specialization. In the technological society of today, scientific advances and the concomitant management advances have been made possible by specialists working as teams. Unless we recognize this same need in range management, I dare say that we will not have to worry about having six pallbearers left from our ranks to carry out the coffin. There will be specialists aplenty from other disciplines to try to do the job, much to the detriment of society.—Gene F. Payne, Egerton College, P.O. Njoro, Kenya.