

Montana Future Farmers and Range Management

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The foundation of the Montana livestock industry is based on the thousands of acres of land not suited for cultivation. The future of this industry depends upon the proper use to be made of this land.

What are Montana Future Farmers doing to insure the future of the livestock industry and their own future?

Grass yield, measured in terms of livestock products, is a subject of very high interest to Montana Future Farmers. They realize their future success in the ranching business is closely correlated with the range which they will control. Montana Future Farmers are striving to establish range improvement practices on their home ranch and in their community. They realize this will improve their community. They realize this will improve their heritage.

Range Management is an integral part of the Vocational Agricultural Course of Study and in the program of work of the Montana FFA Chapters. Practically all chapters are doing some work in range; but the greater emphasis on range improvement is in the range-livestock areas of the state. The study of range management is spreading to the more diversified crop areas of the state. Since the agricultural needs and demands are becoming more intensified, the farm operators in the diversified areas are beginning to realize the value and importance of the foothill and fringe range areas surrounding the land used for intensive crop production.

Increased Interest In Range Management

The change in the outlook and attitudes of the farmers and ranchers of the state is due in a large

degree to the efforts of the various agricultural organizations. These organizations are responsible for promoting and developing a need for greater conservation and utilization of the resources which nature has provided. The organizations which have taken the lead in range promotion are the Soil Conservation Service, Forest Service, County Extension Service, Vocational Agricultural Teachers Association, banks and industry. The personnel of these organizations have foreseen the value of promoting and stimulating a range education program for ranch operators and youth groups who are, and will be, the owners and managers of Montana's greatest resource—GRASS.

Progress in range education at college and high school level has been slow in developing in comparison to other phases of agriculture in Montana. Montana State College offered only one course in pasture and range management to

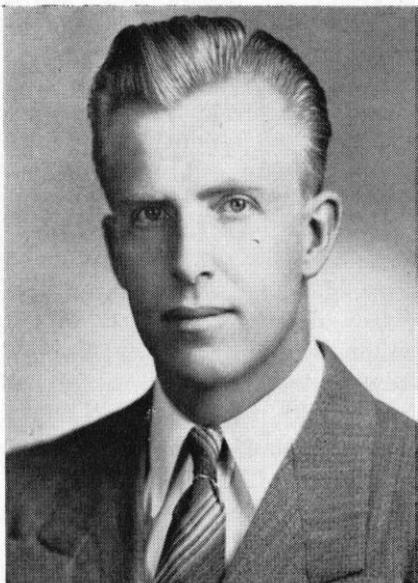
its agricultural students prior to 1942. Since that time, an expanded basic range course has been required for most agricultural undergraduates. This course has awakened them to the fact that range management is a phase of agriculture that has been neglected. In an attempt to alleviate this situation, some Montana Vo-Ag teachers attempted to teach range management to their high school students. The program was not too effective because the teachers were not equipped with the necessary tools to accomplish the task. The majority of the information available was highly technical, and many of the teachers were not aware of the resource people available to help them.

Mr. Turner, formerly of the Soil Conservation Service at Dillon, Montana, was contacted in 1951, to learn if teaching aids were available through the American Society of Range Management. With Mr. Turner's assistance, the aid offered by this organization was placed on a regional basis and the Montana Vo-Ag Teachers were supplied with a list of Society members in the state.

The instructors at the 1951 Summer Vo-Ag Conference discussed the problem of teaching range management to Vo-Ag classes in high school. The teachers expressed the need for a range management course to be offered at the 1952 summer school session at Montana State College.

Range Course Developed for Vo-Ag Teachers

The Range Management Department offered a course in range for Montana Vo-Ag teachers during the 1952 Montana State College Summer Session. Twelve teachers from all parts of the state enrolled in this course. With the help of the staff of the Range Management Department, these men developed a course of study in range to be used in Montana Vo-Ag departments. The course was developed to give high school FFA



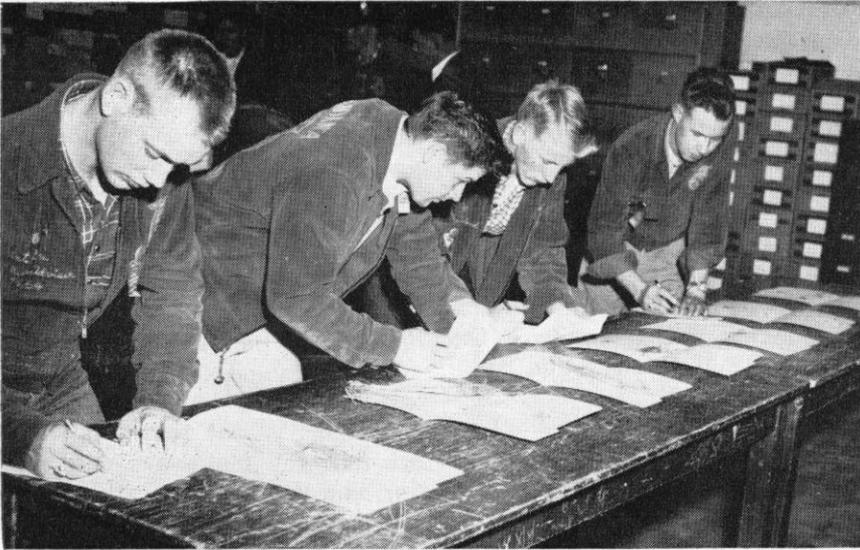


FIGURE 1. Montana Future Farmers participating in the range plant identification contest, a part of the competitive events at the 1955 Montana FFA convention.

members a basic understanding of range management problems and practices. This teaching aid basically covered plant physiology and morphology, plant ecology, range plant recognition, range condition, range improvement and range conservation. A similar range course was again offered during the 1953 summer school session and five Montana Vo-Ag teachers enrolled. These two summer sessions spark-plugged range management activities in the Montana FFA Chapters whose advisors had been enrolled in the range courses.

The range course developed by this group of Vo-Ag teachers in 1952 was made available to all Ag teachers in the state. Instructors who had not attended summer school found this publication gave them a basis for organizing a practical unit of instruction in range. In many cases, four to six weeks were devoted to teaching range practices. Additional instruction is offered by the Extension Service to their organized 4-H Range Clubs. Since rural youths are often members of both organizations, the over-all objectives of the program are emphasized.

Progress in FFA Chapters

Approximately 45 of Montana's 62 FFA Chapters have, or will

have, an established range improvement program included in their chapter activities by the fall of 1955.

The progress made in range management training is exemplified by the activities of the Beaverhead Chapter in Dillon, Montana. Prior to 1952, range management received minor emphasis in this chapter. During the fall of 1952, the Beaverhead Chapter, with the help of the Beaverhead Soil Con-

servation District technicians, initiated an organized range management program for the all-day classes and chapter activities.

The primary purpose of the program was to acquaint the chapter members with existing range conditions on their home ranch and to establish range projects as an integral part of their supervised farming program.

The success of the program required the assistance of the Soil Conservation Service, the County Agent, the Extension Range Specialist, the Forest Service, the local ranchers, and the parents of the chapter members. The cooperation received from these organizations and individuals was excellent. The chapter members had the opportunity to observe water development programs, grazing systems, and other improvement practices in operation by ranchers in the Beaverhead area.

Vo-Ag Training

In the Vocational Agricultural classes, freshmen students became acquainted with the range plant communities found on their home ranches and in the local area. Field trips were taken to observe and



FIGURE 2. Montana Future Farmers judging range condition at the State FFA Convention Contest, 1955.

learn the plants as they grow in the field rather than from mounted specimens. Trips were also taken to acquaint the students with various range conditions and to observe the effects of various management practices.

Ag II, or sophomore, students concentrated on learning the plants that were of major importance to grazing livestock in terms of forage produced, plant relationships, factors associated with plant growth, range readiness, range site determinations, and plant associations found on various ranges.

Ag III students were taught to determine range condition, the factors involved causing various range conditions, and ways and means to improve the range. Different grazing systems used by local ranchers were studied in the field to emphasize the value of using desirable management practices.

To insure the application of the training received in range management, the seniors in Ag IV surveyed the home farm of one chapter member. The class was divided into teams of four to analyze the range and develop a management plan for the ranch. From this, each student with the cooperation of his parents and others who could assist, developed a management plan for his own ranch.

The majority of the field work done in this program was in cooperation with the technicians of the Beaverhead Soil Conservation District. Particular credit should be given to Ben Slanger and Michael Britton for their fine co-

operation in making the program a success. These two men conducted group field trips for the agricultural classes. Emphasis was placed on field observation of range plants, plant communities, range conditions, range condition surveys, and practices in use throughout the county. Ag IV students had the opportunity to work in teams of two for a full day on range management planning in the field with Soil Conservation Service personnel.

To stimulate interest in the program, the chapter received a guest subscription to the Journal of Range Management. Further interest was developed by sending three chapter officers to the Range Society meeting in Idaho in 1954. The chapter members displayed plant collections and have had window displays on range management at the local fairs. Other activities by chapter members included the establishment of range enclosures, range reseeding to provide early spring grazing, sagebrush control, water spreading and development, and deferred grazing systems. Special projects for the improvement of the range were developed by each student for use on his own ranch.

Range Judging Contests

For the past two years the eleven schools in the Southwestern FFA District indicated their interest in promoting range programs by including a Land Use and Appreciation Judging Contest. Present indications are that the six remaining FFA Districts in Montana will inaugurate some

form of range and land appreciation contest in the very near future.

The 1955 State FFA Convention initiated a range condition judging contest as one of the competitive events at this affair. Approximately 156 FFA members from 53 FFA Chapters participated in the contest. The range contest was in two parts. The first was the identification of mounted range plant specimens in which the contestant gave the common name of the plant, indicated whether the plant was native or introduced, the forage value of the plant, and whether or not the plant was poisonous (Fig. 1). The second part of the contest consisted of four plots of sods with their natural vegetational cover placed in two foot by two foot pans (Fig. 2). The contestants scored and placed each of the four plots into the proper condition classes. This activity received many favorable comments from the FFA members and their advisors. The enthusiastic response indicates that range condition judging will become a permanent part of the competitive events at the Montana FFA Convention.

Montana Future Farmers recognize that the stabilization of the livestock industry is dependent upon maintaining and improving Montana's range resource. With youth groups as a trained nucleus, the coming years will show establishment of a permanently progressive range management program as the rule rather than the exception.

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