

IMPACT



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Would You Benefit from a MiG Workshop?

The Situation

According to Idaho "Natural Resource Trends" (NRCS, Dec. 2000), 11.8 million acres of Idaho is privately owned grazing land. Of this, 1.3 million acres are domestic (fenced and managed) pastureland. Idaho domestic pastures are generally grazed season-long. According to Gerrish and Roberts (1999), pastures grazed longer than 30 days have a harvesting efficiency of 40% or less. High stocking rates and low stock densities are common, which can lead to severe grazing, limiting re-growth potential and overall yield. Idaho domestic pastures typically produce 50% or less of their potential due to poor production and harvesting efficiency. Pasture operators lack motivation to improve management because: 1) conventional management has traditionally been viewed as adequate; 2) good irrigated pastures are undervalued; 3) pastures appear to be more resilient to abuse than other crops; 4) land typically planted to domestic pasture is perceived as marginal and therefore of limited financial value; and 5) producers have not recognized the ecological value of pastures.

As pressures from non-grazing interests increase, the traditional federal grazing lands forage base for beef production in Idaho gets smaller. The expanding dairy industry creates further stress on the total forage base. Finally, the cost of producing livestock with the traditional fossil fuel based system is constantly rising as the cost of fuel, fertilizer and equipment increases faster than the value of the products. As a result, livestock operators are leaving the industry and their rural communities. Developing, adapting and implementing more

economically efficient and environmentally acceptable methods for harvesting and utilizing forages underpins the long-term success of this industry and the Idaho families it supports. Increasing the productivity of domestic pastures in Idaho offers an opportunity to maintain or expand the forage base that supports livestock industries and the surrounding communities.

Our Response

To improve livestock operator understanding and implementation of the principles of Management-intensive Grazing (MiG), eleven outreach programs featuring multi-day hands on workshops for operators have been held across southern Idaho. Some of the topics covered in the intensive 4 day hands-on workshop include: the five principles of grazing, tools for managing grazing, anatomy and physiology of forage plants, grazing cell design, low stress livestock handling techniques, and livestock health considerations. To determine if participants in these workshops have come away with a better understanding of the principles involved in grazing management and have put what they learned into practice on their own farms and ranches, we conducted a Critical Issues Grant funded survey of past attendees.

Program Outcomes

A total of 110 past participants were surveyed to determine if participants in these workshops have come away with a better understanding of the principles involved in grazing management. The survey also tried to determine if past participants in the Lost River Grazing Academy Management-

intensive Grazing Workshops had put any of the principles of grazing into practice on their own farms and ranches.

Over eighty percent of the respondents had either increased their level of management or at least changed their level of management. Forty-seven percent of survey respondents reported labor costs remained the same or went down. Respondents in general increased the number of livestock they were grazing. Respondents reported an increase in weaning weight while experiencing an increase in the number of cows bred on time. The total number of days grazed increased by 32 percent. Respondents also reported 1) a decrease in the number of weeds, 2) fertilizer costs remaining the same or declining, 3) a decrease in animal health costs and 4) a decrease in their winter feeding costs. And finally, the true measure of success of the program, respondents reported an increase in their bottom line. The results of this survey would indicate that a management-intensive approach to pasture management does reap benefits.

The Future

Since this survey was conducted, three more grazing workshops have been held. Plans are to continue to survey alumni to measure their successes and to continue to improve the Lost River Grazing Academy Management-intensive Grazing Workshop. Results reported here are but a few among many of the successes reported by graduates of the Lost River Grazing Academy Management-intensive Grazing Workshop. If these results intrigue you and you want to learn more, sign up for the next workshop to be held in Salmon, Idaho at the Nancy M. Cummings Research and Extension Center, June 11-14, 2007.

The workshop will help improve the livestock operator's understanding and implementation of the principles of Management-intensive Grazing (MiG). Topics covered in the intensive 4 day, hands-on workshop include the five principles of grazing, tools for managing grazing, anatomy and physiology of forage plants, grazing cell design, low stress livestock handling techniques, and livestock health considerations. Participants in this workshop do come away with a better understanding of the principles involved in grazing management.

A growing network of operators are developing, adapting and implementing more economically efficient and environmentally acceptable methods for harvesting and utilizing forages. Are you ready to join them?

For More Information

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