



Evaluating Grazing Management
Implementation Projects
Matt Stoltenberg Rangeland Consultant

Nebraska Conservation Collaboration Cooperative Agreement (CCCA)

- Are we Improving Habitat, Changing Perceptions, Improving Producers Operations?
 - Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
Prescribed Grazing, Brush Management
 - Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)
Prescribed Grazing, Brush Management
- Natural Resources Conservation Service- Funding Partner
- Rainwater Basin Joint Venture- Funding Recipient

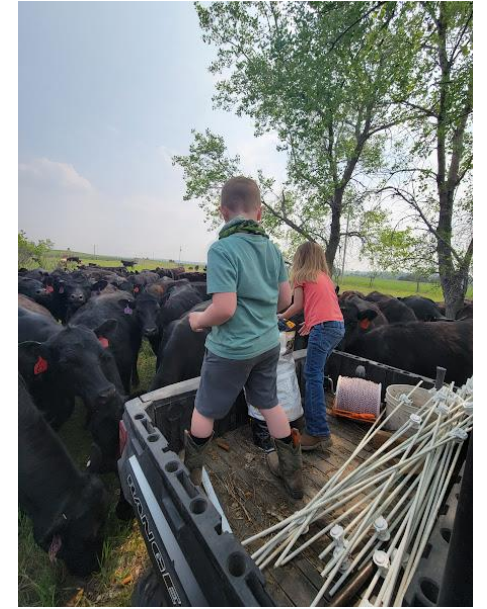


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- 12 years Rapid City South Dakota area
 - Belle Fourche River Watershed Partnership
 - 319 Implementation Project
 - Rangeland Inventory, Planned Grazing Project
 - Grazing Follow up project with NRCS
- South Dakota Grasslands Coalition
 - Grazing School Follow Up Program
- Ranch Auditor for Food Alliance, Audubon's Conservation Ranching Program
- CSP Consultant
- Custom Livestock Grazing Operation



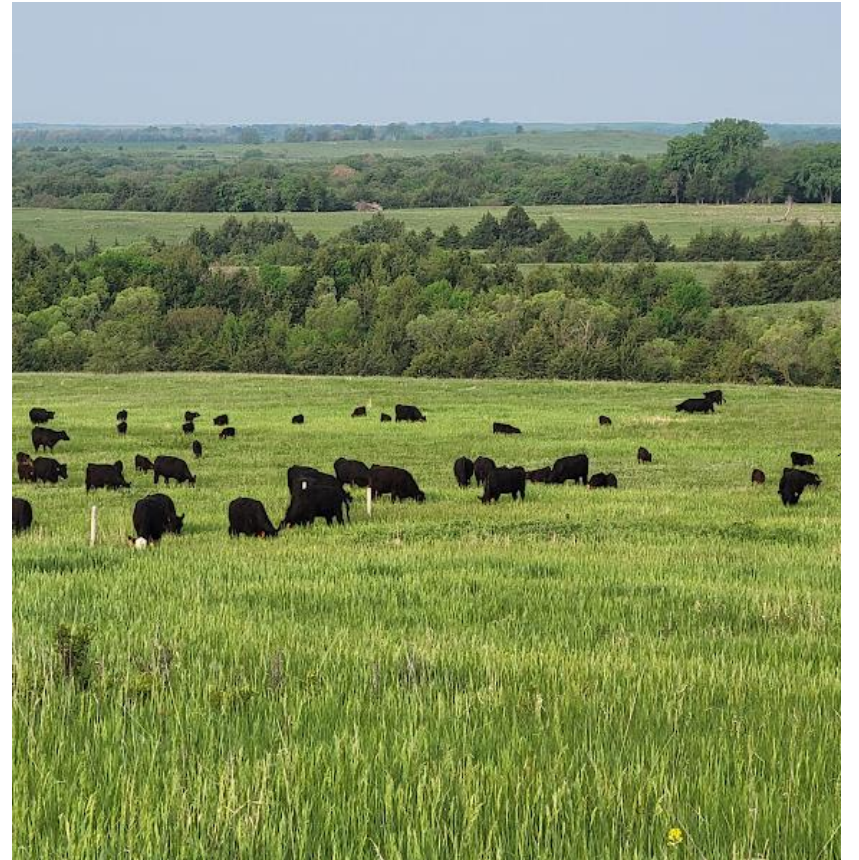
Methods

- Create standard template questionnaire
 - Input from NRCS, RWB, Partner Agencies
- Local NRCS offices eastern Sandhills 40 producer participants
- Conduct in person interviews
- Summarize questionnaire results
- Create final report



Participants

- 39 Participated in EQIP, 37 participated in CSP
 - 40 Prescribed grazing
 - 28 Brush management
 - 11 Prescribed fire
 - 35 Cross fencing and water development
 - Other practices wildlife enhancements, grass seeding, well decommissioning



Were the goals or expectations of the program conveyed in a manner that was easily understood?

- 26 (out of 40) had been working with NRCS for several years and even decades
- Consensus from the participants that were new to the programs felt NRCS spent the time to communicate expectations
- Hurdles or issues that were overcome include:
 - Clarification in deadlines
 - Burn permits were cumbersome
 - Switching personal or offices created a communication barrier

Primary Motivation for Enrolling in the Program?

- 24 **Facilitating a new management strategy** #1 reason
- 9 **Upgrading ranch infrastructure** #1 reason
- 6 **Financial incentive** #1 reason
- 1 **gaining technical assistance from NRCS** #1 reason
- Of the 11 participants that implemented **prescribed fire** 8 of them stated **technical assistance was one of the main driving factors**



Would practices be feasible without cost share?

- 35 implemented livestock water improvements
 - 21 water development would have not been feasible
 - 6 water development was not extensive, could have done it on their own
 - 8 would have done some water development, not to the extent
 - 28 would have done brush management cost share greatly sped things up
 - 3 prescribed fire participants stated they would have never tried the practice without cost share assistance





Did the implemented practices work together to improve management of the rangeland resource?

- **All participants recognize facilitative practices worked together to improve the management of the resource**
- 20 went in with the mindset to improve water system
 - Shift in grazing management mindset
- 20 understood facilitative practices were part of the path to improve grazing management/resource

Have there been additional practices implemented financed out of pocket or by other partners?

- 23 implemented additional water and cross fencing
- 24 of the 28 that implemented brush management continued follow up work and new clearings funded out of pocket or by another agency
 - Sandhills Task Force
 - Pheasants Forever
 - Game and Parks Commission



How has the program fit into their operation?

- Changed mindset towards resource management
 - Rest, rotation, changing season of use, learning to identify key plants
- Promote and build the burning community
- Has made their ranch run more efficiently
 - Combining herds, open areas for grazing, ease of cattle movement
- Sped up the progress by at least 10 years (specifically brush management)

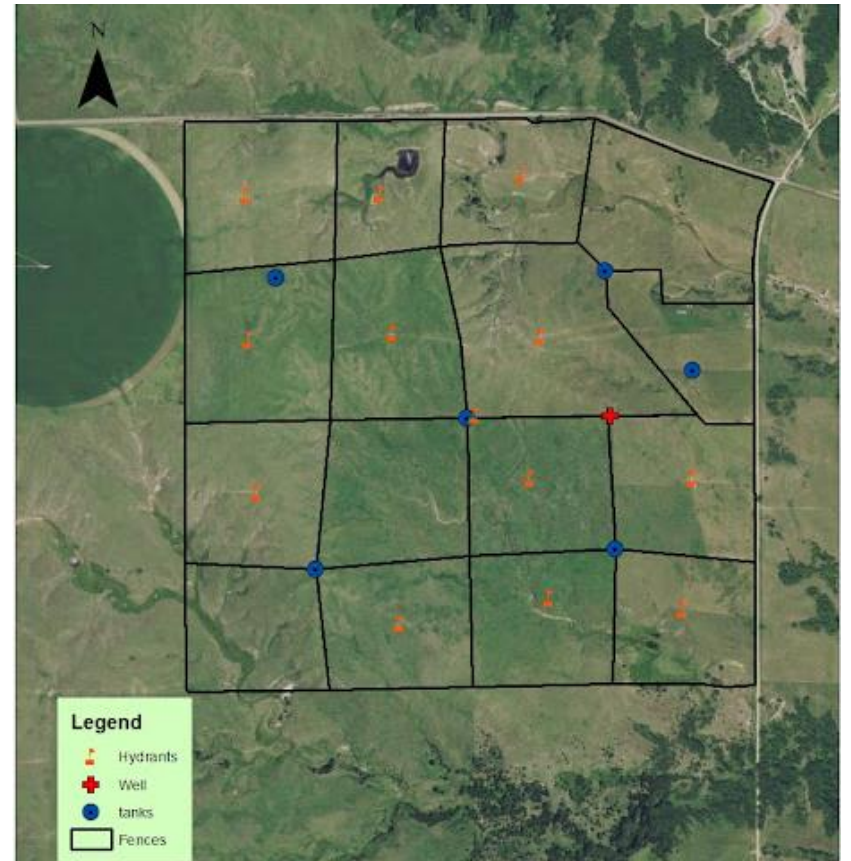
Did they find issues with NRCS implementation standards that they felt impeded installing practices or would have they made changes to original plan?

- 13 of 40 Had no issues with NRCS standards
- 9 Participants would have put in more tanks
 - Didn't account for future growth of the ranch
- Grazing standards
 - Not able to implement on winter grazing areas
 - Economics on leased land
 - Management intensive system
- Challenges with burn permit process



Are they formulating a grazing plan prior to the grazing season?

- 5 of 40 Participants make a detailed plan
- 34 Claimed they have a well thought out plan, not documented
 - Simple rotations with only a few pastures
 - Try to change season of use



Are they keeping grazing records?

- 22 Keeping records prior to participating in the program
 - Programs improved record keeping skills
- 17 were not keeping them prior to participation but will continue
- Majority use them when making future grazing decisions

August 2021

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	2	3	4	5	6 started moving cows NE corner west pasture AM	7 Total 8 cows praise for over 2.5 Mg!
8 I think all cows are in pasture spayed cow shuts AM	9	10 moved cows to free lawn 12:00 PM	11	12 started moving cows west LO pasture	13 Cattle leave in white LO AM	14 Moved cows to S.B. PM
15 Calf tag last leg in 12:00 PM	16	17	18	19	20 35" move cows W 1/2 cabin PM	21
22	23 .05 Rain	24 .60"	25	26	27 .90" move cows to east / West west pasture AM	28
29	30	31 1.10" Rain Cows + Bully out 11:00 - 5 Cows 103				

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Do they have a drought management plan?

- 5 specific drought plan with trigger dates
- 15 observe the weather and condition of the grass
 - Take in less cattle
 - Use yearling cattle as a buffer
 - Utilized banked grass set aside for winter grass or future burn areas
- 20 do not have a specific plan
 - Cull older animals, sell heifers instead of retaining them
 - Find additional pasture or hay



What improvements have they noticed?

- **39 Improved livestock distribution and harvest efficiency**
- **40 Visual rangeland health improvements**
 - Blowouts and trailing issues
- **18 Livestock performance improvements**
 - Weaning weights
 - Breed up rates
 - Better eye on cattle

Have they been able to increase carrying capacity?

- 25 Not the goal but have increased stocking rates over time
 - 17 running more numbers
 - 8 extended grazing season
- 13 Have increased carrying capacity, chose to bank the grass
- 2 Installed a management intensive system, goal of increasing stocking rates



Did they change grazing management practices because of program participation?

- 25 Increased stocking rates
- 35 Changed season of use
- 24 Changed from set stocked to rotational grazing
- 12 Combined herds
- 12 Started a monitoring program
- 11 Stockpiled grass for prescribed burning or drought buffer

Do they continue to seek professional support for land management decisions? Who do they utilize?

- 35 NRCS
- 17 Knowledgeable peer
 - Burn Association
 - Ranching for Profit
- 3 Consultant
- 8 Partner Agencies
 - Sandhills Task Force
 - Game and Parks Commission
 - Pheasants Forever
- 2 Comfortable where they are at



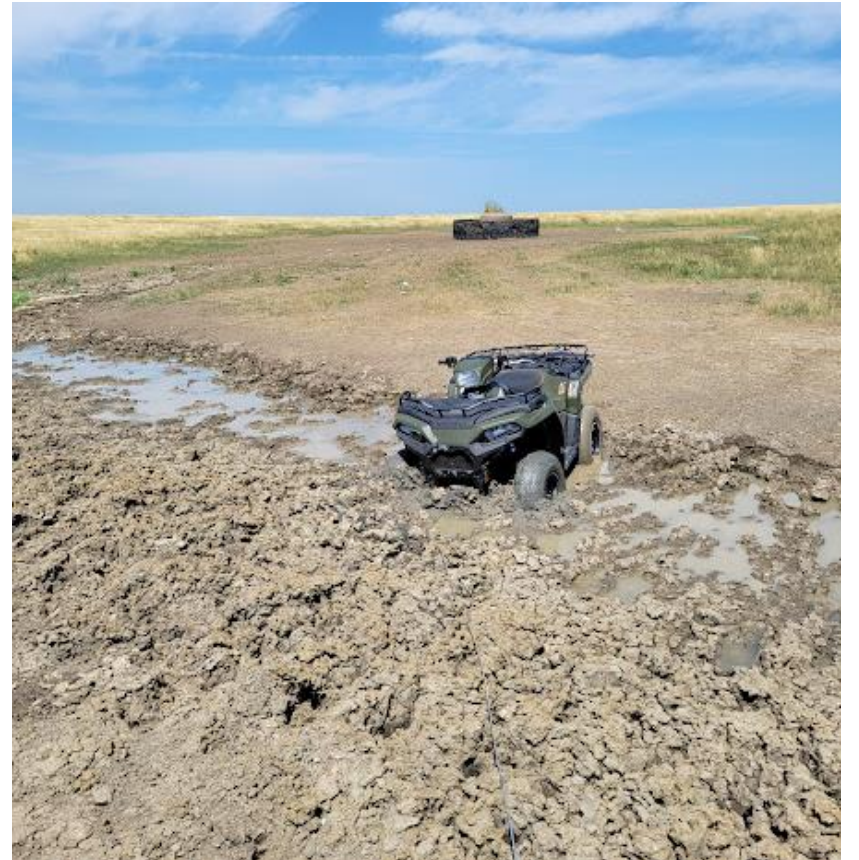
Is there a need for further assistance both facilitative or technical?

- 16 Water development
- 10 Brush management
 - 2 Fire specifically
- 2 Grazing Management
- Other
 - Energy efficiency
 - Riparian Improvement
 - Dam restoration
- 10 Comfortable where they are at



Biggest barrier for future improvements?

- 32 Financial
- 11 Knowledge
- 36 Time/Labor
- 10 Social Issues
 - Ranch transition
 - Working with absentee landowners
 - Fire culture



Overall perception of the program, ways to improve it.

- 28 Great benefit to the ranch
- Ways to improve it:
 - More long-term planning funding smaller incremental practices
 - More funding for small projects
 - More technicians to work through burn plans
 - Some policies broad in scope, would like to see more flexibility in both grazing standards and burn standards
 - More assistance for management intensive grazing systems
 - Better communications on deadlines

Take Aways

- Change in resource management mindset
 - Awareness of management alternatives
- Opportunities to facilitate change
 - Cost share incentive
 - Knowledge availability
- Community building
 - Grazing community
 - Burning community





Questions?