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The Quivira Coalition

Sharing Common-Sense Solutions to the Rangeland Conflict

CRISIS, CHANGE, AND GROWTH: Ranching for Profit

by Cathy McNeil

Desperate times call for desperate measures! Crisis in our operation forced us to desperately seek alternatives to the manner in which we had been operating for the previous 90+ years, and become less dependent on our Forest Service Allotment. Ten years later, we have.

In the spring and summer of 1989, conditions were extremely dry in the San Luis Valley of Colorado and the flanking San Juan Mountains to the west. One day in mid-July, we received a message from the Forest Service that we would have to remove our cattle by October 1 from our USFS grazing allotment because of the drought.

My husband Mike and I panicked. This had never happened before in the nearly 100 years that the McNeil Ranch had been operating and driving cattle up to the Platoro Allotment (since before it was the Rio Grande National Forest). We had 420 pairs (mother cows and their nursing calves), roughly one-half of our herd, up on that range with no place else to put them and nothing to feed them for the ensuing two and a half months. We were facing a crippling feed bill. In the meantime, we were busy putting up hay on most of the home place, and maintaining the other half of our herd.

Editor's Note:

This is the second in our series on the ***New Ranch***. This edition focuses on the ***Economics of the New Ranch***, with perspectives by ranchers, economists and environmentalists .

We had done it that way for nearly 100 years, cutting over 1200 acres of high elevation (7700 ft.), native hay meadows once and then about half of that again a second time. In 1989, we had no contingency plan. The only option we saw at the time was to bring the cows and calves home and graze the hay meadows. Then we would be forced to purchase $60,000 to $70,000 worth of hay for the winter (which was very high-priced because of the drought), unless of course, we wanted to significantly de-stock.

Wake-Up Call

Fortunately, it started raining in time, and we were able to stay up on the range longer. However, this was a giant wake-up call, and we didn't want to be caught off guard like that again. Not only that, we were beginning to hear things like "cattle free by '93" and began to realize that public lands grazing was

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From the Founders

Jim Winder
Courtney White
Barbara Johnson

Congratulations to Courtney who has just been named the New Mexico section of the Society for Range Management's "Range Innovator of the Year (!)."

Welcome to the new millennium.

So far it looks to be busier than the last one, at least for the Quivira Coalition. In December, the Board approved an ambitious agenda for 2000; one that expands our reach, we believe, while not departing from our mission.

Here are a few highlights:

Grass Bank Conference. Scheduled for November 17-18, in Santa Fe. This conference is co-sponsored by the Conservation Fund and the Malpai Borderlands Group. The goal is to bring together individuals and organizations involved in the efforts to create or operate grass banks and light a fire under the movement.

On Sunday we will tour the Valle Grande Grass Bank on Rowe Mesa with Bill deBuys.

Herding Clinic. This is scheduled for Tuesday-Thursday, May 9-11, 8am-4pm, at Ghost Ranch, located north of Abiquiu. This three-day, hands-on clinic will emphasize the techniques of low-stress livestock handling (sometimes called the "Bud Williams" method). Participants will get one-on-one training with the instructors and the cattle. Planning for a successful herding operation will also be discussed.

The instructors are Tim McGaffic, Steve Allen, and Guy Closson. Each instructor has many years of experience handling livestock. The textbook will be Burt Smith's *Moving 'Em*.

Costs: $150 for the three-day course; $25 for the textbook (optional); $77 for food and board

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at Ghost Ranch; $15 for membership in the Quivira Coalition (required if not already a member).

Space will be limited! Don't miss this opportunity.

New Ranch Conference. Scheduled for mid-summer at the Farm and Ranch museum in Las Cruces. We will debut our publication, *The New Ranch: An Owner's Manual*, at this conference. The manual will focus on the ecology and economy of progressive ranch management. Speakers will include scientists, ranchers, and others.

Monitoring Workshops. Scientists from the Jornada Experimental Range will lead intensive, two-day workshops on how to monitor rangeland health. The goal of these workshops is to train individuals, especially ranchers, on how to use JER's new monitoring manual. The first will be held April 8-9 at the Sevilleta Wildlife Refuge. We encourage ranchers to attend. Gathering good data on the environmental conditions of rangelands will be CRITICAL to the future of ranching in the region, especially on public land. Monitoring will help people take charge of their destiny. See page 28 for details.

Outdoor Classrooms on Rangeland Health. We will continue our successful series of Classrooms under the guidance of range expert Kirk Gadzia. The goal is to explore the fundamentals of range health in a grazing context. Participating ranches this year include the CS, the Bowe, the Hubbell, Malpai Borderlands, Sid Goodloe's Carrizo Valley Ranch, and Ghost Ranch.

Tours of Projects. We initiated, or are involved with, four cooperative, on-the-ground projects, including a thinning-burning/habitat restoration effort in the mountains above Peñasco; a planned grazing project on the Williams Ranch in Catron County; and a mine and watershed reclamation project located near Cuba, New Mexico. Other projects are upcoming. We plan to lead tours of each project this year.

Drought Workshops. We conducted a successful workshop on ranch management under drought conditions last year (it concluded in a rain storm!). We'll have another workshop, or two, this year. The first is March 25 in Cuba. As another dry year looms before us (and more to come, according to scientists), it is in the interests of ranchers, conservationists, public land managers, and others to explore new ideas in livestock management under drought conditions. See page 28 for details.

Tours of Ranches. We will continue to lead free tours of progressively managed ranches.

To name only a few events.

It promises to be an exciting year. We hope you will join us at one or more of our events. The best way to learn more about grazing and the possibilities of common-sense solutions is to come and see the results for yourself!

Let's get the millennium started on the right foot.

For up-to-the-minute information on UPCOMING EVENTS, please visit our website, www.quiviracoalition.org

From the Founders

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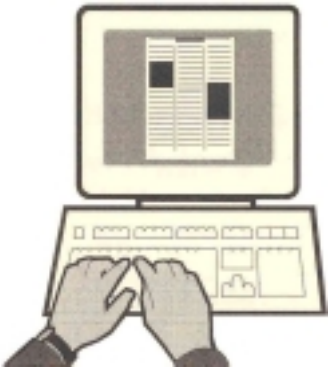

Quivira Coalition Website

We are pleased to announce that our website is up and running! You can visit us online at **www.quiviracoalition.org**

Putting Profit Into Ranching

by Stan Parsons

Stan Parsons owns a business called ***Ranch Management Consultants*** *which teaches a school called* ***Ranching For Profit*** ***7719 Rio Grande Blvd., N W Albuquerque, NM, 87107 505-898-7417*** *rmcalbq@aol.com*

Although the RFP school covers every aspect of ranching, they are particularly good about economics. They teach all around the world.

The maximization of profits doesn't just happen. Profits are planned. Profit is the result of management. But having more money in the bank does not mean you have made a profit. Profit means having a bigger business—a larger net worth at the end of the year than you had at the beginning. Profit is an economic issue while the amount of money in the bank is a financial issue. We need to understand the difference if we are to run a successful business.

The profitability of the business is determined by how the business is structured, the choice of enterprises, and the underlying land and labor components which determine the overhead costs. Finance on the other hand is the money part of the business—the source of capital, the loan arrangements, and the cashflow. Money is the fuel that drives the business. Economics is the way the business is engineered or put together. The things we do to improve profitability are different from what we would do to improve finances. They are different subjects.

Strange as it may seem, it is possible to have made a loss and yet have more money in the bank. Imagine, for instance, that you experience a drought so bad that it is necessary to sell animals. The sale of animals results in income, so the bank balance improves; yet we surely don't expect to have made a profit, do we? No, of course not. If we judged profitability purely by the amount of money we had in the bank, we should obviously pray for a drought every year, but that would be stupid.

Conversely it is possible to have less money in the bank and yet have made a profit. That would happen, for instance, if you decided for whatever reason not to sell the animals, or other products you produced, but held them over to sell the following year. Your bank balance might not look very good but you have still produced a product that is ready to be turned into cash when you choose to do so. In other words, your net worth has increased, and that means that you have made a profit. To keep the business going financially, you may have to borrow money or dig into cash reserves. Nevertheless, you are better off than you were a year ago, even though you may have a temporary cash shortage.

The Three Secrets for Improving Profit

So, how do you increase profit? There are only three things you can do. **You can improve the gross margin per unit, increase the number of units you produce, or decrease overhead.** As much as that may sound like an over-simplificationn, there are no other things that can be done to improve profit.

Of course, there are many things that affect profit, but it is in one of those three categories that the solution must be sought. Rather than searching for a needle in a haystack, start the process of elimination by narrowing down where the major problem lies. Is your problem poor gross margin from one or more of the enterprises? Could it be that your overhead is exorbitant, or is it just that there is inadequate turnover, i.e., size of business to cover the minimum overhead needed to run the business? One of these is a bigger problem in your business than the other two. But you must know which one. There is no point in trying to increase profit by supplementing your animals better, or looking to improved genetics to increase gross margin if the real problem is too high an overhead. Look for the dead wood in the business and start there.

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Gross Margin

Gross margin is the gross income produced by the enterprise minus the direct costs associated with that enterprise. That is, the gross margin is the net contribution that each animal, or each acre of production, makes toward overhead costs.

GROSS MARGIN = ENTERPRISE INCOME - DIRECT COSTS = (PRODUCTION x PRICE) - DIRECT COSTS

To improve gross margin, we must either increase income per animal through greater production or improved prices, or decrease the direct costs. Direct costs are those costs which increase if one more animal or acre is added, or conversely, if there is a decrease in production by one unit.

Major livestock direct costs are: interest on the capital invested in the animal, supplementary feed, and veterinary expenses. For most crops, the direct costs include chemicals, fertilizer, seed, land preparation and harvesting costs.

Overhead

Overhead costs are those costs which remain virtually unchanged regardless of whether it is a good year or a bad year. For all practical purposes, they remain unchanged for any particular business as the number of animals or crop acreage changes season to season. Often called fixed costs by the economists, these costs are not fixed. They can be changed. I prefer to use the term overhead to avoid the implication that these costs are "fixed" and therefore of no concern to us in restructuring the business.

Overhead consists mainly of land-related costs and labor-related costs. Land costs include rent, repairs to fence, roads, water reticulation, and buildings. Labor-related costs include wages, housing, and machinery. (Machinery is considered to be a labor cost because it is a substitute for labor.)

Turnover

Turnover, or volume of business, is largely dependent on the number of units of production per year. The more units sold, the greater the contribution toward the overhead. Imagine, for example, the impracticality of trying to cover the overhead of a ranch with only one cow.

Improving Income

The traditional way of improving income is to increase production. There is no doubt that production levels are important and are directly influenced by management. However, don't ignore the question of price. Because we produce commodities, we frequently believe we must be price takers and can't do much about market price. The traditional approach to marketing has been at the operational level, involving contracting and hedging. As important as these are, there may be far more fruitful opportunities by restructuring the business at both the tactical and strategic levels.

So much of our emphasis in agriculture has been placed on increasing efficiency through production that the whole field of strategic-level management and concomitant business restructuring has been ignored. But if significant change is to be made, it must be made at the strategic level.

Improving gross margin sounds as though it should be the province of the animal scientist and the agronomist. Indeed, when it comes to a question of efficiency it probably is. However, the important

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Putting Profit Into Ranching

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Some Thoughts on the Conditions of Rangelands in New Mexico

by Thomas Jervis, President
New Mexico Audubon Council

"A science of land health needs, first of all, a base datum of normality, a picture of how healthy land maintains itself as an organism."
Aldo Leopold, 1941

Following a period of 600 years of relative climatic and ecological stability, changes in range land ecosystem structure have occurred in relatively recent historical time. These are the result of the breakdown of essential ecological processes, making it difficult for naturally resilient ecological systems to maintain their equilibrium and leaving little room for native wildlife. We have seen grass lands converted to shrub lands; savannas converted to closed forests; and riparian bosques converted to channelized rivers. In the process, native fauna and flora have been impoverished.

Range lands in the arid West are quite variable, but prior to the beginning of the 20th century had evolved to a state of equilibrium that was stable to most natural disturbance, principally drought, but in some cases also large selective herbivores—Bison. The ecological processes of growth, reproduction and decomposition have co-evolved with natural disturbance to create a dynamic equilibrium, changing in the short term to accommodate these natural disturbances but stable in the longer term. In some cases, such as Ponderosa Pine savanna, disturbance (fire) is a central feature in maintaining the equilibrium.

One problem with these natural systems is that the equilibrium they represent is *metastable*. By this I mean that, while stable to natural variation, when stressed beyond a natural range, these systems may fall into new ecological states that are fundamentally different. Like a ball on a table, everything is fine unless you push the ball too hard in one direction and it falls off the table. These new ecological states may be stable, but we don't yet know that. What we do know is that the graphic descriptions of 19th century grasslands that first drew people to this landscape are no longer valid.

There is ample evidence to suggest that, even if left alone, these systems will never revert to their pre-disturbance state, even on geological time scales. The ball will not bounce back up onto the table. I believe that we have pushed many of these ecosystems far beyond the natural range of their variability, destroying the stability of these systems by breaking down the ecological *processes* that provide that stability. The changes in vegetation that have occurred may not be reversible without substantial management attention. In particular, if soils are lost, as they have been in some areas, recovery is probably impossible.

Goal of Range Management

Because so much range land has been degraded, the primary goal of any range management should be the restoration and maintenance of those ecological processes that characterize stable range ecosystems. Stable ecosystems are productive in the long term; unstable or declining ecosystems are not, though they may be in the short term. We must also recognize that *processes* that ensure long-term stability may degrade productivity in the short term. Fires burn forage, but they ensure the maintenance of a diverse cover of grasses and forbs.

The situation is not all bad. Restoration in some cases will only require relatively minor changes in the way range lands are managed, and need not require the removal of grazing livestock—perhaps only changes in intensity, duration, and timing of grazing pressure. In other cases, more dramatic interventions may be needed, including complete removal of livestock. In some cases, restoration will require large amounts of

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Some Thoughts on Rangeland Conditions

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water, energy, and money, and may therefore never occur. Restoration of Cottonwood bosques from Saltcedar demonstrated at the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge costs about $1,000/acre, not counting the cost of water.

Restoration

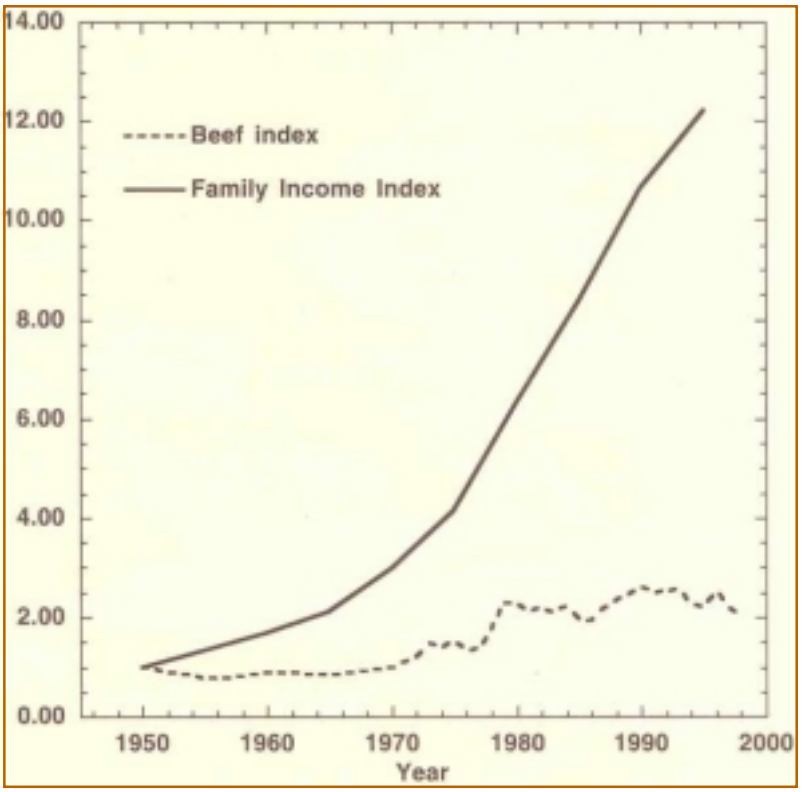
Nevertheless, restoration of natural ecological processes is essential to restoring the stability of our range lands, thereby ensuring their long-term productivity. This means restoring and maintaining the full natural diversity of native plant and animal species including the reintroduction of extirpated species. If we wish to use the land on a sustainable basis, we must first restore natural processes and then keep our short-term disturbance within the envelope of natural variability. We must also refrain from any long-term disturbance that fundamentally alters the ecological processes that define the ecosystems involved.

Grazing clearly depends on the natural productivity of the range for its continuity. Inasmuch as changes have occurred in the landscape, and natural processes are not functioning properly on range lands, and inasmuch as vegetation patterns have changed, these changes are prima facie evidence for the absence of sustainability of grazing *as practiced on those lands.* Conversely, the existence of lands that are grazed where ecological processes are largely intact is evidence that grazing is not *necessarily* incompatible with healthy range land.

Economics

However, if the sustainable use of the grazing resource must be exceeded in order to produce adequate income for ranchers, the problem with ranching is more economic than environmental, although the consequences for the ecosystems involved can be dramatic. It is therefore important to look at the economic environment as well as the natural one.

Consider the figure below, which shows beef prices (price of choice steers at Omaha) and median family income both indexed to their 1950 level. Beef prices have not changed appreciably in the last 20 years. Improvements in productivity, particularly in crop production driven by substantial inputs of low-cost energy and water, have enabled the development of a high productivity beef industry that for the most part does not depend on ranching either for its stock or for feeding. The efficiency of this industry has kept prices low and



that in turn is putting pressure on the ranching business.

Ranchers can compete with this trend only with increases in the productivity of their operations comparable to those in the larger livestock industry. Because ranching is funda-

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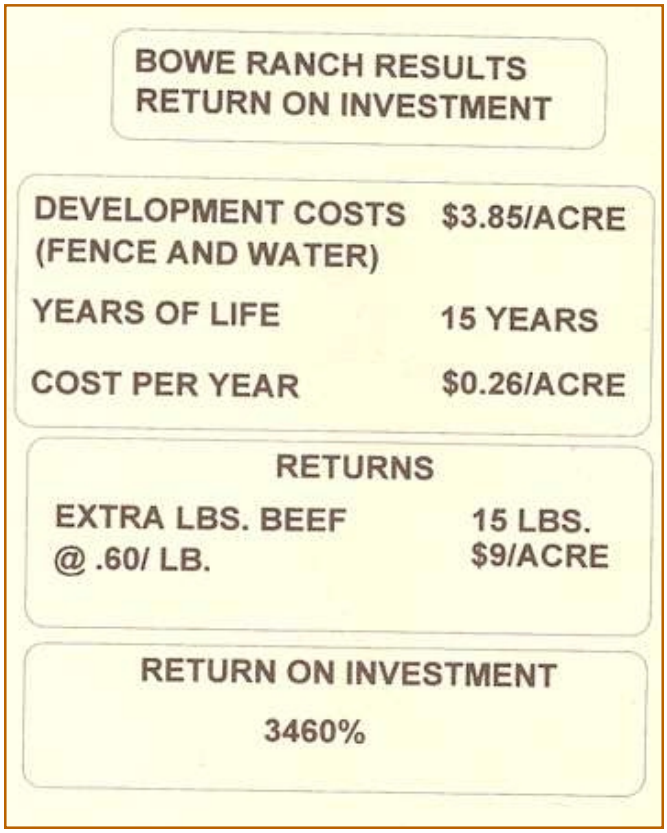
Economics vs. Ecology

by Roger Bowe

Do you believe, as a lot of people do, that if your economics is improving then the ecology must suffer? In fact, if you want a good definition of an oxymoron simply mention that good economics equals good ecology. Another way to express this dichotomy is to use a football analogy. Football is a zero-sum game in that when one team gains a yard the other team has to lose a yard. I believe this conforms to a lot of people's paradigm when it comes to economics and ecology.



I think that a convincing case can be made that this paradigm is absolutely false. Economics and ecology, especially when considered in the long run, are inherently linked and should be looked at like a win-win game not a zero-sum game. In other words, if a rancher or farmer wants a good long-term economic situation, they will have to have, at the very least, a sustainable ecological base. More than likely we need an improving ecological base. Do natural resource managers (my word for ranchers) really have the knowledge to make a profit while improving their resources or environment? Would anyone outside the ranching business believe us if we could?

Declining Resource Base

In 1979, I came back to the ranch near San Jon, NM, with a degree in economics and a desire to put my education to the test. My goal was to provide a decent living for my family and do something that I loved doing. It didn't take long to realize that our resource base was not improving or even sustainable. We were putting ever-increasing technological inputs on the land while stocking rates were declining. This is a situation a lot of resource managers find themselves in and one of the reasons so many are giving up and quitting to find a job in the city. When I moved back, there were 15 or so families within 5 years of my age making a living off the land in our community. In 2000, there is one besides me.

Facing this dilemma of a declining resource base and reduced profitability, we decided to invest in education rather than chemicals and attended a school on Holistic Resource Management. Allan Savory's course was by far the most productive investment in time and money we have ever made. Although the going was tough and we made our share of mistakes along the way, I came to believe that, indeed, economics and ecology is not a zero-sum game.

A Change

The key to increased profitability and ecology is not some technological breakthrough but

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Economics vs. Ecology

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simply a change in the way we make decisions. Using the Holistic Model, we set goals that we want to see happen to the land ecologically. Using the "tools" of proper grazing, animal impact, and technology, we have met many of our goals, although we have a long way to go yet.

We started this new decisionmaking process in 1985. At that time our stocking rates were about 1 cow to 35 acres. Our pounds of beef per acre were around 15 and our cost per pound of beef was about $.60 per pound. Our main concern at the time was "How do we increase our weaning rates and how do we control brush encroachment?" Thanks to our new training, we started making these critical decisions differently.

Economics

Let's first look at what has happened in the years since 1985 economically. We invested about $4 per acre in fencing and water development. We now have 62 paddocks that we use for our main cowherd. We plan grazing according to recovery periods that growing grass needs to recover both above and below the ground. When grass is not growing, we budget the grass to keep as high a nutritional level as possible for the cows.

With this new decisionmaking process, we have seen our stocking rates climb as high as 1 cow to 16 acres and pounds of beef per acre as high as 35. I once did a quick return on investment, and assuming my cost of fence and water was $4 per acre with a life of 15 years, this capitalizes at 26 cents per acre. If we could average an increase of 10

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BOWE RANCH RESULTS
COST PER POUND OF BEEF

ITEM:	1983	1990
FEED	.14	.09
REPAIRS	.02	.002
INTEREST	.07	.03
SUPPLIES	.03	.01
CHEMICALS	.01	0
VET & MED.	.02	.007
GAS & OIL	.02	.006
TAXES & INS	.02	.007
UTILITIES	.006	.003
LAND RTRN 3%	.25	.10
TOTAL	$.60	$.26

BOWE RANCH RESULTS
PRIORITIES FOR PROFIT

1. STOCKING RATE
2. MANAGEMENT
3. CALVING RATE
4. WEANING WEIGHT
5. RATE OF GAIN
6. BREED OF ANIMAL

STOCKING RATE INCREASE
1983 - 1:35 1993 - 1:15
230% INCREASE

Profile of Good Stewardship:

The Flying M and the Diablo Trust

As the Metzgers learned the hard way, the dark side of economics can suddenly jump up and bite you, literally.

That's what happened to the Metzgers' Flying M ranch, which was enjoying a relatively smooth transition from the "Old" to the "New" ranch when an unanticipated natural event occurred; an event whose heavy economic price nearly cost the Metzgers their ranch.

Fortunately, the same principles of progressive ranch management that had unexpectedly precipitated the crisis were the ones that delivered the Metzgers from disaster. As a result, they learned that economics is sometimes more art than science.

How the Metzgers turned adversity into opportunity is quite a story.

In The Beginning

Jack Metzger's great-grandfather homesteaded in the Flagstaff area in 1894. He grew hay as a cash crop initially, then switched to cattle. In 1906 he moved southeast of town to start the Flying M. The country grew good grass, but lacked adequate water. As a consequence, the Metzger family expanded their operation over the years until the Flying M settled on its current size of 90,000 acres (one-quarter is private land, the rest is national forest and state land).

As far back as the 1950s, Jack's father, Herb, attempted to talk the Forest Service into trying new ideas on the allotment. One idea Herb liked was more frequent rest for the land—an idea that he picked up while listening to friends from Maine, where the benefits of rest were more quickly visible in the humid climate.

"My dad spent a lot of time looking at the land," says Jack, "carefully studying the effects of various ideas." Eventually the elder Metzger talked the Forest Service into a novel rest/rotation system for the Flying M.

The inspiration for Herb's ideas, of course, was the bottom line. "In 1960, you could buy a ranch and the cows could pay for it," says Jack, "but today cattle won't even cover the interest."

When Jack became active in the ranch's operation in the 1970s, he discovered that its management was increasingly defensive and reactionary. New demands were being made on the ranch. Recreational pressure, mostly from weekenders fleeing Phoenix, began rising, as did heat from environmental groups. All of which cut deeply into the day-to-day business of running a ranch.

It didn't take the Metzgers long to realize that the economics of ranching were changing rapidly, and permanently.

A Better Way

In the late 1970s, seeking a new approach to alleviate these pressures, Jack and his family attended the second school in holistic management ever taught by Allan Savory. They returned to the Flying M "thinking a lot about what we had learned," said Jack. They opted to try a small experiment. They set up a cell/rotational system on 3000 acres and were amazed to observe an immediate increase in forage for their cattle. The wildlife liked it too. The Metzgers decided to expand the experiment.

Economically, the switch to rotational-style management had an immediate positive effect on the

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ranch's profit margin. For starters, the family reduced their horse herd substantially, which cut down on the bills. They needed fewer cowboys too, which saved on labor costs. Fuel costs dropped too. But best of all, the Flying M was growing more grass.

Lots more grass.

On the other hand, it was a rough transition for the cattle; breaking old habits of wanderlust added stress to their ruminant lives, and reduced performance—for a while. Eventually, the cattle rediscovered their herding instincts and today are cooperating nicely. The abundance of new grass probably helped soothe their concerns.

By the third year the ranch was able to increase stock numbers 25% over the old rate. Profits went up too. As a result, the Flying M entered a new phase of economic growth—one of capital expansion. New wells were dug, windmills bought and erected, roads improved, and fencing expanded. They borrowed money to pay for these improvements, and crossed their fingers.

But their luck was about to run out.

Disaster

In the fourth year, elk discovered the Flying M's new grass. Tons and tons of elk. As many as 2000 elk came and stayed that winter, "hammering it," according to Jack. The environmental benefit created by progressive ranch management had caused the land to be overgrazed—by elk, not cattle. The irony wasn't lost on Jack.

For the next eight summers, because of the damage the elk had done, the Metzgers excluded 15,000 acres of the ranch from cattle grazing—at a serious financial cost. They had no choice, Jack says. The grass wasn't there anymore, though the elk still were. Fortunately, the progressive ranching model they employed enabled the Metzgers to utilize the rest of the ranch in a controlled, careful manner.

Progressive management had another big benefit too, one that ultimately helped the ranch recover. It required documentation—photographs, annual surveys of monitoring plots, exclosures, data collection, charts, and so on. In a few short years, the Flying M had accumulated a substantial amount of base information about the condition of the land—information that demonstrated conclusively that elk were overgrazing the land, not cattle.

It was information that many people in the state and federal agencies did not want to acknowledge. Denial of the elk problem was their first response—followed shortly by finger-pointing. "The question of who was to blame," says Jack, "nearly caused fisticuffs among the agency people."

Meanwhile, the Flying M was sinking. The economics of a stock reduction, which dropped as low as 42% of previous totals, was causing serious pain. Worse, however, was the emotional cost. Despite taking a voluntary reduction to help the land recover, Jack continued to receive grief in the press for his trouble. People had a very hard time believing that a "natural" animal like elk could overgraze the land, and they said so publicly, and repeatedly.

The toll wore the Metzger family down. They contemplated selling out. Fat profits from real

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Good Stewardship: The Flying M and the Diablo Trust

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The Diablo Trust meets the second Friday of each month either in Flagstaff or out on the ranches. Visitors are always welcome.

For more information, contact Mandy Metzger at:
The Diablo Trust
P.O. Box 31239
Flagstaff, AZ 86003
or call (520) 523-0588

Quemado Project Update

The Quivira Coalition is assisting Jim and Joy Williams to develop and implement a new grazing management strategy for the Williams Ranch. The goal of the Quemado project is to demonstrate how innovation, education, and cooperation can help rural communities remain viable in a rapidly changing world.

During the mid-1990s, the Forest Service reduced Jim's permitted cattle numbers by a third. Jim was concerned that his numbers might be reduced again, which would probably put him out of business. The issue of contention was the condition of the ranch land, which the Forest Service officially graded as "poor." Jim contested that evaluation and joined a class-action lawsuit against the Forest Service to get it overturned. In 1998, he decided to try a different approach, however, and asked the Quivira Coalition for help.

Last year, we conducted three workshops in the Quemado area. The first, in February, featured a lecture by Kirk Gadzia on the principles of progressive ranch management and a tour of the nearby Hubbell Ranch, which employs those principles. This workshop drew over 40 people, most of whom were Jim's ranching neighbors. The second workshop took place in May, when a large group of people toured Jim's ranch. Participants included the Forest Service, ranchers, the Catron County Farm Bureau, and members of the New Mexico Riparian Council.

In November, the Quivira Coalition hosted a three-day seminar on progressive management, taught by Kirk again. Co-sponsored by the Catron County Farm Bureau, the seminar drew a dozen people, including Jim and Joy.

Meanwhile, Kirk and Jim,

(Below) Kirk Gadzia, Jim Williams and Steve Libby discussing the proposed grazing plan.

(Right) Quivira Board member Kris Havstad (foreground) discussing the condition of Jim's land at a tour with the Forest Service.

Quemado Update

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with the full cooperation of the Forest Service, developed a new grazing strategy for Jim's ranch. The Quivira Coalition bought topographic maps for Jim. Using existing pastures and fences, Kirk and Jim devised a rotational plan that included grazing along Largo Creek only during the dormant season.

Jim reports that, six months later, the benefits of the new plan are tangible. Cattle weights are good, pregnancy rates are good, range conditions are improved (a fact confirmed by the Forest Service), and he was able to delay feeding his herd for nearly two months!

In more good news—the financial cost to Jim for this change in grazing strategy has been ALMOST ZERO. He shared Kirk's consultation fee with the Quivira Coalition, and paid for the seminar. That's it.

He hasn't bought or erected any new fencing. There hasn't been a need to develop any new waters, or construct water-related infrastructure, as a result of the new plan (he might dig a new well next year, but it isn't required —and the Forest Service will cover much of that cost).

Best of all, says Jim, he has reestablished communication with the Forest Service. He praises John Pierson and Pat Morrison of the Quemado district office, and Steve Libby, of the supervisor's office, for their support. This new relationship, says Jim, gives him a lot of hope for the future.

The Quivira Coalition will continue to assist Jim and Joy in any way we can.

(Left) Jim and Courtney. (Below) UNM students doing baseline monitoring in Jim's riparian area.

(All photos by Courtney White.)

The Far Horizon

by Courtney White

"The most significant weakness of the conservation movement is its failure to produce or espouse an economic idea capable of correcting the economic idea of the industrialists."— ***Wendell Berry,*** farmer and author.

(Quotes in this article are from Wendell Berry's book ***Another Turn Of The Crank****, Counterpoint Press, 1996.)*

Recently, a member of my wife's family asked me what I did for a living.

I hesitated before responding, perhaps for a beat too long. He greeted my answer, that I directed a non-profit organization that was trying to influence the grazing debate, with a silent nod. Either he didn't give a damn about cattle, or else he did and didn't want to cause a stir.

My hesitation intrigued me, however. What I really wanted to say was this: I am a professional saboteur. I should have told him that everyone involved with the Quivira Coalition were saboteurs of one sort or another. Like our European predecessors, who protested the Industrial Revolution by throwing their wooden shoes (*sabots*) into the machines that were replacing them, we are protesting the expanding machinery of corporate globalization.

Education is our molotov cocktail. While some choose to blockade streets with their bodies, or break the windows of multinational shopkeepers as a way of protest, we prefer to fight back by provoking a dialogue about land, local economies, communities, grass, trees, wildlife, and dirt. Our sabotage is aimed at a remote and humorless industrial economy that is consuming souls as efficiently as it is chewing up open space.

Our *sabots*, in this case, are ideas.

The 2d Industrial Revolution

One can hardly open a newspaper or turn on a television today without being bombarded with evidence of what some are calling the Second Industrial Revolution. Between the expanding influence of the Internet, the globalization of the economy, the mega-corporate mergers, unprecedented wealth creation, and an addictive dependence on technology, we are creating an awesome corporate machine, one that grows bigger, faster, and hungrier by the day.

By now, it should be clear who the victims of this Second Industrial Revolution will be—endangered species, rural communities, open space, air, earth, and water. We are a nation beset by materialism and commodification; and nowhere is this more apparent than in our evolving attitudes toward nature. Technological "advances" combined with expanding global demands for raw natural resources have placed an unprecedented stress on our ecosystems. At the same time, the recreation industry has commodified nature into a playground for fun and profit.

Meanwhile, the environmental crisis continues to build, as does the need for protest and action. Unfortunately, the response of some environmental activists to this global turn of events is an attempt to separate the "social" from the "environmental" and focus strictly on the latter. They call it "pure environmentalism"—i.e., do whatever is best for the critters and the trees, and damn the consequences for people.

Ironically, their hero is John Muir, despite his famous observation that "When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find

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it hitched to everything else in the universe."

Like a virus, "pure environmentalism" has injected itself into many ongoing national environmental campaigns, including the "zero cut" and "zero cow" movements. It has created its own illness in the process, however, in the form of cascading litigation and bad blood, without affecting the industrial sickness that is besieging world health.

The appeal of absolutism is obvious, as is its desperation. It does not tolerate shades of gray, or moderation. It is a blunt instrument, being used purposefully and indiscriminately by certain environmentalists in the struggle against the hegemony of the industrial economy. Their anger and frustration are understandable, though their double standards, and their misanthropism, are not.

Their blows, however, either by accident or design, have fallen mostly on rural people, not corporations. That's because their goals, when you look closely, are primarily political, not environmental. Which is why, as an act of resistance, "zero cut" and "zero cow" are doomed to failure.

Meanwhile, the global economy rolls on.

Radical

Absolutism is not the answer, but collaboration might be. If a broad alliance of diverse, yet like-minded dissidents heaved their sabots into the machine all at once, it might make a difference. It is certainly worth a try.

Chief among the dissidents is a farmer, Wendell Berry. In books, essays, and lectures, Berry has been imploring conservationists, rural people, city people, all people to heed his advice that the "social" and the "environmental" are inseparably intertwined. The key link, he insists, is economics.

"You cannot specialize the work of conservation," writes Berry. "You cannot save the land apart from the people or the people apart from the land…to save both the land and the people, you need a strong rural economy."

Land, he observes, is always in use by somebody, even wilderness. The goal of conservationists should not be an attempt to eliminate use, as the absolutists insist, but to demand that land be used sustainably. "A good…land-based economy," says Berry, "would aim to join the local human community and the local natural community or ecosystem together as conservingly and as healthfully as possible."

Berry cites two principle reasons for the ruination of land: ignorance and economic necessity. They are often connected. People have ruined land, says Berry "mainly by overusing it…And behind this overuse, almost always, has been economic need." Too often, this "need" is nothing more than greed (if you have a million dollars, for example, do you "need" another million?).

Berry blames the economic exploitation of our natural world on an industrial economy that exists solely for its own enrichment, and for the impoverishment of the countryside. "The era of cut-and-

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"The goal of conservationists should not be an attempt to eliminate use, as the absolutists insist, but to demand that land be used sustainably. 'A good…land-based economy,' says Berry, 'would aim to join the local human community and the local natural community or ecosystem together as conservingly and as healthfully as possible.'"

The Far Horizon

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"...we must do nothing less than rediscover our humanity. 'In order to preserve the health of nature,' concludes Berry, 'we must preserve ourselves as human beings—as creatures who possess humanity not just a collection of physical attributes but also as the cultural imperative to be caretakers...to one another and to the other creatures.'"

run economics ought to be finished," laments Berry. "Such an economy cannot be rationally defended...the proofs of its immense folly, heartlessness, and destructiveness are everywhere."

The answer, he says, is the development of a community economy whose "aim is generosity and a well-distributed and safeguarded abundance." To do this, we must do nothing less than rediscover our humanity. "In order to preserve the health of nature," concludes Berry, "we must preserve ourselves as human beings—as creatures who possess humanity not just a collection of physical attributes but also as the cultural imperative to be caretakers...to one another and to the other creatures."

Within the modern environmental movement, that is truly a radical idea.

Center

How can the environmental community assist local communities to build self-sustaining economies (as an act of sabotage)? I have four suggestions:

1) **Create alliances.** It is time to drop the "us vs. them" mentality toward rural people that has dominated so much of the struggle to preserve our natural heritage. Our fight is with the corporate economy, not with the family farmer or rancher. We should be allies, instead. Mom-and-pop, agrarian-based capitalism is a powerful countervailing force to global industrialism. It should be supported by conservationists, not destroyed.

2) **Participate in local economies.** Vote with your checkbook, especially when good land stewardship is involved. There is a renaissance of small-scale, sustainable, ecologically sensitive economic activity going on out there—organic farms, holistic ranching, farmers' markets, predator-friendly beef products, and certification programs. Best of all, not only are the products of these activities good for the land, they're good for YOU. They taste better too (compare an organic steak to a non-organic one sometime!).

3) **Get out on the ground and ask questions.** How do ecosystems actually function? What role do grazing ungulates play in the maintenance of rangelands? What plant is that? Why is there a subdivision here? How can I help? Information is the foundation to knowledge and action. Of course, this applies to rural people as well. They need to ask questions too, such as: why IS that species endangered? What can I do to help it recover?

4) **Work in the radical center.** Stop supporting absolutist organizations and causes that purport to help the environment, when, in reality, all they do is give aid and comfort to the industrial economy. Instead, support local and regional efforts that build alliances, engage in education, and work to establish sustainable local economies. There are more "centrist" organizations out there than you might realize; and more are being created every day. At the same time, we should encourage the national environmental organizations to work in the radical center too.

Grab a *sabot* and join us.

pounds of beef per acre valued at 60 cents per pound, this is a return on investment of 2300%. If someone would give me a stock pick that had that kind of potential, I would certainly look into it!

Ecology

So economically things look a lot better, but what has happened to the land or ecology? We used fixed point transects to help us determine what was happening to ground cover, density of plants, diversity of plants, and soil surface conditions. We have seen very positive results here also. In some areas bare ground, which is every rancher's enemy number one, has decreased over 50%. New plants or increased litter has covered what once was 70% bare. Ask any farmer or gardener the beneficial effects of a covered soil in windy eastern New Mexico. There is much less erosion and the ground accepts more rain as it falls. We have seen our water tables rise in some areas even though annual precipitation is below normal. Plant diversity has increased in some areas from 3 or 4 species to 15. This increased diversity has become possible by reducing overgrazing and overresting of plants by proper grazing and animal impact.

I think a powerful case can be made that if your ecology is improving then profits will follow, when decisions are made holistically. It would be a sad thing to me if I thought like the zero-sum gamers—that if I advanced one yard economically that the ecology had to give up a yard. With better decisions we don't have to pit one against the other and indeed they are truly on the same team.

Economics vs. Ecology

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MONITORING RESULTS - BOWE RANCH
SAN JON, NEW MEXICO USA

NORTH CELL	1984	1986	1990	1991	1992	1993
% BARE GROUND	46	54	25	26	39	30
% LITTER	44	39	57	62	49	54
% BASAL COVER	8	7	18	17	17	16
% MATURE CAPPING	42	22	2	2	5	2
AVG. PLANT DISTANCE	1.8	0.86	.96	.70	.95	.69
SPECIES PERENNIAL GRASS	6	NA	17	17	17	18
LBS. BEEF PER ACRE	14	23	29	31	31	26
NET INCOME PER ACRE	5.84	8.00	19.4	18.4	22.5	NA
% BROOM SNAKEWEED	11	NA	1	1	1	1

Culture, Ecology, and Economics of Ranching West of the 100th Meridian

A Conference to be held at Colorado State University May 4-6, 2000

The conference will explore the innovations that ranchers, ecologists and economists are developing in the effort to make ranching sustainable into the next century. Registration information can be obtained at 970-491-6222.

Good Stewardship: The Flying M and the Diablo Trust

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Author Wendell Berry during a visit in November to the Flying M with Quivira Board member Dan Dagget. (Photo by Courtney White.)

estate development on their private land looked very tempting; and they thought about it long and hard.

An Even Better Way

In the end, Jack opted for an act of defiance instead. He told the agency people he intended to restock his ranch to its original levels—and that they had better figure out a solution to the elk problem, quick. He dared them to object. To his surprise, his decision was supported by the Forest Service.

Next, the Metzgers joined forces with the neighboring Bar T Bar ranch to the east. Together, the ranches combined to encompass over 400,000 acres of land. The two ranches planned their operations together, sharing the pain and the gain, which helped both ranches economically.

Better yet, in 1993 the ranches decided to form a nonprofit organization, called the Diablo Trust, to assist them with many of the non-ranching challenges that confronted them on a daily basis. Over 100 people attended the first meeting, including many agency people, and some environmentalists.

"The original goal of the Diablo Trust," says Jack, "was to help us be proactive, instead of reactionary." Committees were established to focus on specific concerns, such as recreation and wildlife. A facilitator was hired to help the members of the Trust reach consensus; and Jack's wife, Mandy, became the volunteer Director.

The Trust's mission statement reads: "The purpose of the Diablo Trust is to maintain ranches as long-term, economically viable enterprises managed in harmony with the natural environment and the broader community."

Today, the Trust meets monthly; it has 18 working groups; it raises money for science, education, and monitoring projects; it conducts community outreach programs, including an annual art-on-the-ranch day; it publishes a regular newsletter; and it strives to accomplish its goals through collaboration and innovation. For its efforts, in 1998 the Diablo Trust was designated a National Reinvention Laboratory by the federal government.

Perhaps more importantly, by picking up these modern "chores," the Trust has allowed the Metzger family to concentrate again on the day-to-day business of running a ranch. The economic picture is brighter these days, too. Costs are down, production is up. According to Jack, the Flying M produces 29% more pounds per cow today than it did in 1979, thanks to progressive management.

The Metzgers' elk troubles have not gone away. What is different, however, is the recognition among state and federal authorities that a problem exists. Jack says there is now a concerted effort underway to solve the elk problem. For its part, the Flying M is cooperating wherever it can.

Jack is cautiously optimistic about the future. It's been a wild ride, but the Flying M is still in business, and should be for as long as the Metzgers want to stay on the land.

And that's saying a lot these days.

question is one of effectiveness, and, if the business is to be truly effective, we must look not at the nitty gritty of improving efficiency but at the broader question of strategy. We must see the forest as well as the individual trees. This applies as much to the question of gross income as it does to the question of direct costs.

Interestingly, looking at the bigger picture—the forest—may be the only way to save the trees.

In brief, working with nature so that cows and ewes calve and lamb at the time they would without man's intervention is the first step. That change alone means there will be a reduction in feed costs—essentially a decrease in substitute feeding, and probably also in death loss and associated veterinary expenses.

From a marketing standpoint, there are many opportunities to be had by developing policies which play the market-price cycle rather than by pretending that we can ride out the cycle without changing herd size or paying attention to what the market is telling us.

Overhead Reduction

Interestingly enough, the same steps which will reduce direct costs also have a major impact on overhead. When animals reproduce in synch with nature, less substitute feeding is required. In turn, that means less conserved forage like hay and silage and therefore fewer man hours and less machinery. It makes sense, but it does require that the business be restructured with a view to the total impact it will have on every enterprise, the people, the economics, and the finances.

Increasing Turnover

There are two broad avenues that can be explored in order to increase turnover, i.e., more of the same and fuller use of existing resources.

Through more sophisticated grazing techniques, it is possible to increase ranch carrying capacity quite significantly. Conditions vary from area to area and from year to year so it is impossible to say just how much improvement can be made. A relatively reliable average figure is about 40%—provided allowances are made for the starting stocking rate, the manager's ability, and seasonal fluctuations. Please be advised that people who advocate doubling the stocking rate are pipe dreaming. That might happen under exceptional circumstances , but it is not a figure on which to build expectations.

Increased turnover does not necessarily mean simply doing more of the same but rather finding ways to utilize the varied assets that we own, very often without even realizing they exist. Society's value of natural resources has changed. When buying a ranch, people are bidding for things other than livestock production. They are paying for scenery, for space, for recreation, for conservation. It's no longer enough to be solely in the cattle business. To make fuller use of existing resources means to recognize the values that people place on your ranch, scenery, lifestyle, or endangered species, and cash in on these values. The best conservationist is one who gets paid for his/her effort.

To recap, the profitability of the business is determined by how the business is structured, the choice of enterprises, and the underlying decisions which determine the overhead costs. Enormous efforts at the operational level pale in comparison with the impact that correct strategic-level decisions have on the business. That is why regular quality time working on the business is so important to business success.

Putting Profit Into Ranching

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"Through more sophisticated grazing techniques, it is possible to increase ranch carrying capacity quite significantly. . . . A relatively reliable average figure is about 40%. . ."

Crisis, Change and Growth

(con't from page 1)

becoming more and more tenuous and unpredictable.

As a reaction to that situation, we attended a Holistic Resource Management training, spending five days with Allan Savory and Kirk Gadzia, because we had heard that stocking rates could be increased using Holistic Management.

Now, 10 years later, the ranch has been in operation for over 100 years, and our mother-cows and their babies did not go to the mountains at all in 1999! But 600 of our own yearling calves did. We kept our entire cowherd at home, grazed them through the former hay meadows, and are now utilizing standing re-growth as winter-feed.

Cut and piled hay at the McNeil Ranch, with cranes lifting off from the piles. (Photo by Cathy McNeil.)

A few hundred acres (200-300) of hay were put up, both baled (which we contracted) and cut-and-piled (cutting and piling is a process where near-dormant grass is cut and windrowed into rows, then the rows are raked into piles and remain at that location).

Last year (1998-1999) we didn't sell any of our weaned calves as we usually do. (As a cow-calf operation, our income has been primarily derived from turning bulls in with cows to breed them, calving them out, maintaining the cows and their nursing calves until weaning age, weaning the calves, and selling them as steers for fattening, and heifers for breeding and fattening.) Nearly all of our own calves from 1998 were retained on the ranch. They were weaned at the customary time, and there was enough forage to maintain the pregnant cowherd and their weaned calves over the winter.

So not only were we able to increase our carrying capacity enough to hold over our own calves and send them to the mountains the following year, but we deferred our primary income for almost a year. We were able to operate throughout 1999 and draw personal living expenses from previous years' retained income, the sale of unused machinery, and cull cows (cows that can't raise a calf successfully). The herd needed stringent culling anyway, and we weren't using the machinery, because of the changes in our haying practices. The operation actually made a small profit in 1998 from these sales, because we have such low expenses.

What's more, we still haven't sold all of the yearling calves that came out of the mountains this autumn, and our after-depreciation, net income is estimated to be around $100,000 for 1999.

There was tremendous security in knowing that if, for some reason, we were evicted from our USFS allotment, we could simply sell our calves earlier than anticipated and not have to de-stock our cowherd.

There have certainly been many challenges and struggles in these last 10 years—most notably, very low cattle prices and another

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Crisis, Change and Growth

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severe drought in 1996, which forced us to partially de-stock. The most recent transition period that we have been going through has been very challenging as well. By holding on to so many of our own calves, and deferring much of our 1998 income and most of our 1999 income to fall '99, we have had to be very frugal.

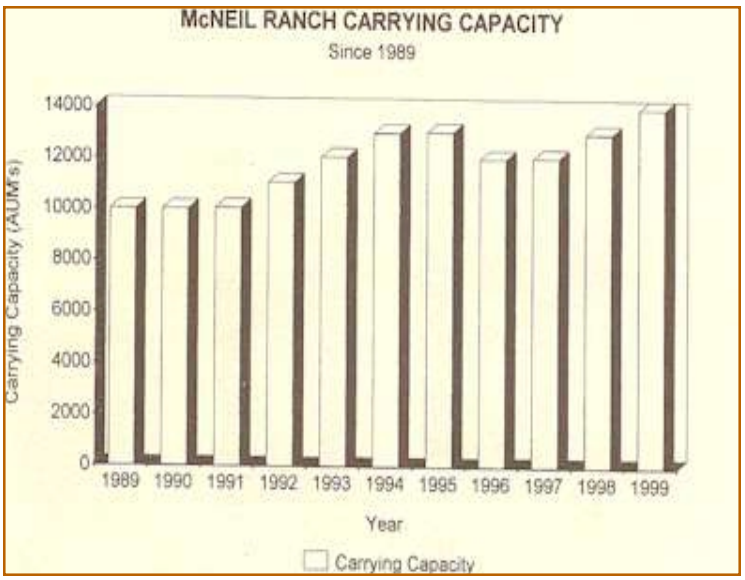
Increased Carrying Capacity/ Decreased Costs

Over time, we have gradually increased our carrying capacity, while greatly reducing expenses. In 1989, our annual expenses were in the neighborhood of $230,000. Currently, our annual expenses are around $190,000. Our 3000 deeded acres and Forest allotment used to carry 850 cows year round. It now carries 800 cows, and 500-600 of our own calves to yearling age and older. Those calves not retained are sold before one year of age, and are usually calves that don't look like they will grow out.

We are fortunate in our timing in that we held on to our calves when prices were very low, and now the yearlings are fat and slick from the mountains, and prices are up. We have already sold 270 yearling steers and heifers, with another 200 left to sell next year (of those 200, 140 are in a feed lot in Kansas, while we retain ownership of them, and the other 60 are still at home). (During the drought of 1996, we destocked our replacement heifers, and so still must retain extra replacements to make up for that year, so we don't have as many calves to sell as we normally would.)

This summer, we will take the 1999 summer calf crop up to the mountains as yearlings and do it all over again. Running yearlings in the mountains for the first time this summer was very challenging, but thanks to the diligent and exhaustive efforts of our riders Gilbert Mackey, Dale Edwards, and Aaron Laske, our count came out at 100%. We look forward to the upcoming herding workshop offered by the Quivira Coalition (see page 2), to help us figure out how to handle yearlings in the mountains with less effort.

Slow Changes



For the first few years after opening up to a broader perspective, we really didn't make many changes, but worked on trying to get the family to operate a little more harmoniously, and do some team building with the family and our employees. I know it sounds "touchy-feely" and it is, but things can operate much more smoothly when the people involved can articulate their feelings openly and in a constructive manner.

Before making any major decisions, we try to plan as thoughtfully and diligently as we can to move us toward the quality of life we jointly and personally desire. Annual planning sessions occur with our one part-time and two full-time

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Crisis, Change and Growth

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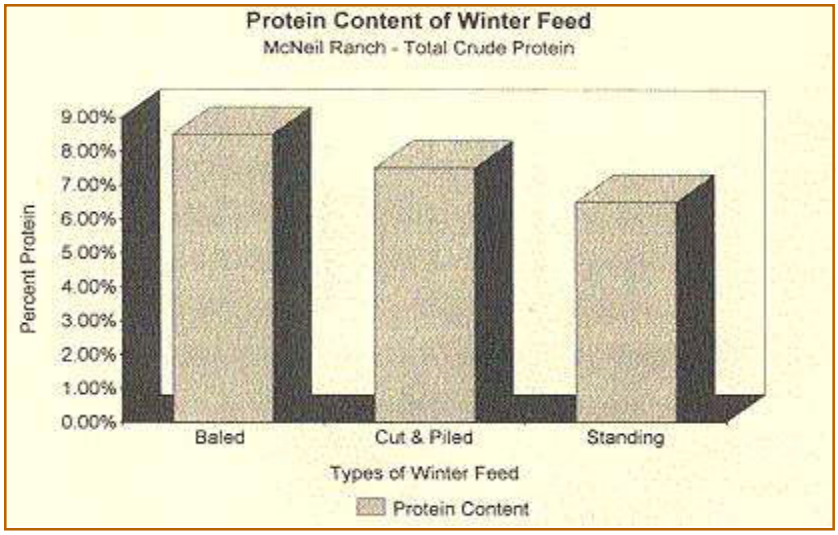
employees, along with weekly planning and monitoring meetings during some parts of the year.

Calving

After the team building, the first major change that was made in our operation was to move calving from late January and most of February to late March and most of April. We thought that, if nothing else, there were at least more hours of sunlight on any given day. To us, it no longer seemed to make sense to calve early. Since we still drive our cattle into the mountains (we don't truck them), we had to calve early enough so the calves were old enough to drive, so we moved calving to March and April. To give the calves a few more weeks of age, we changed our on date/cattle drive from June 16 to July 6, and ran more numbers to complete our AUMs. Now the age of the calves is a moot point. They don't go until they are a year old, and can easily make the drive (which we have moved back to June 16 again).



With the help of Steve Russell and some other wonderful folks at NRCS, in 1996 we embarked on a "Great Plains" fencing and water development cost-share project that involved rigorous and innovative planning. In 1997, on our own, we adapted irrigation structures to more effectively control water in conjunction with grazing, where we had previously put up hay.

Hay

Now we graze through our hay meadows once during the growing season, and again during the winter as standing dormant feed. Because the grass has been grazed once, the standing dormant feed is young and tender enough to be palatable, but mature enough to have had sufficient leaf surface for photosynthesis and root regeneration. The results of forage analysis showed the protein content of the standing dormant grass to contain 6.5% protein, the cut and piled hay 7.5%, and the baled 8.5% protein.

The comparative costs of the various forms of winter feed production are negligible beyond regular overhead for the standing dormant, about $5.00 per ton for the cut and piled, and $30.00 per ton for baled hay. For the difference in price, the piled hay provides adequate protein for a cow that is not near calving or newly lactating, and one can purchase many different forms of protein supplementation. While our changes make our own operation much less dependent upon fossil fuels and steel, we realize that many forms of protein supplementation that we might purchase are very dependent on them.

In a non-economic sense, our quality of life has been greatly enhanced without the stress of putting up hay most of the summer,

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and calving in the middle of winter.

A small part of what we graze once during the growing season is then put up as baled and piled hay. We contract with a neighbor to bale the few hundred acres, and have sold a majority of our haying equipment. We have gone from owning 5 tractors, 2 windrowers, 3 Hesston Stackers, 2 stack feeders, 2 rakes, and a crawler/backhoe, to now owning a John Deere 4040 loader-tractor, one 50-year-old Ferguson 30 tractor, one windrower, a Darf rake, and a dump rake.

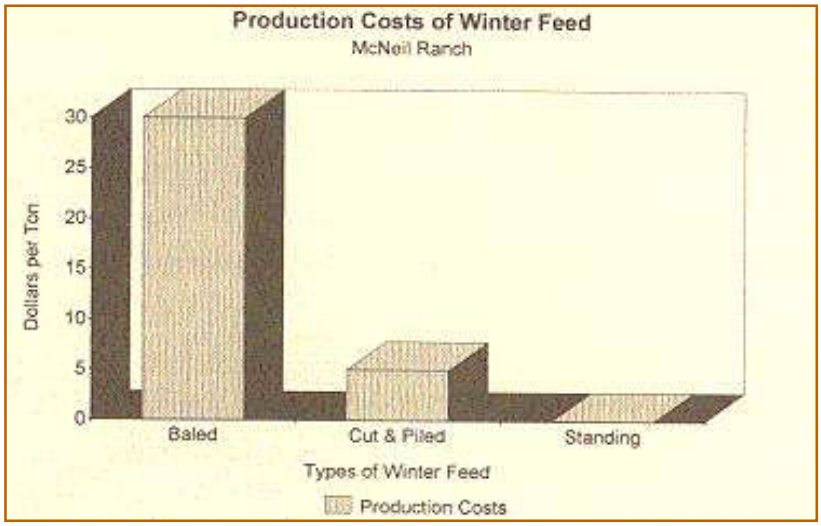
What If?

So what happens during a winter with a five-foot snow? It's been known to happen in the Valley, though very infrequently. This is one of the questions we most often hear.

Should we have a year with several feet of snow on the ground, we can use the loader-tractor to clear a swath in the standing dormant grass and remove the snow for the cattle to graze. In this way we have still only made one pass across the meadow with a machine as opposed to several with standard haying and feeding methods. The other option is to wean calves early, and have cows be dry (without nursing calf), creating a lower nutritional demand.

The piled hay is fairly easy for cattle to access in the snow, especially with a large herd. Snow melts quickly around the piles from their own internal heat, and as they absorb sunlight.

As to the question of snow, we also like to point out that it is probably much more difficult to calve in that much snow than it is to feed standing dormant and piled hay. Calving in the spring makes all the sense in the world to us. When our cattle have their peak nutritional requirement, we have our highest quality forage available in green and growing grass, which we are growing more and more of, with the same amount of land and water.



Economics

How does this all translate economically? We are making a decent living. The Ranch is our sole livelihood, and we live comfortably. To the best of our knowledge, our employees are the highest paid ranch hands in the San Luis Valley, and we provide them with family medical insurance (on top of Worker's Comp), a retirement/life insurance policy, a house, utilities, beef, and ample vacation time.

We were fortunate in that we inherited the ranch debt free, and had sufficient life insurance and liquid resources to pay the enormous estate taxes. This has made it easier to make a living than if there was a note on the property requiring annual land or tax loan payments. Right now, however, there are many ranchers who own their property

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Some Thoughts on Rangeland Conditions

(con't from page 7)

mentally limited by the natural productivity of range lands, it is difficult to increase fundamental productivity. Some efficiencies can certainly be found, but short of fertilizing and irrigating range land, the natural processes that govern growth, reproduction, and decomposition force a hard cap on ranch productivity.

On the other side of the equation, Americans, including ranching families, have come to expect the improvement in standard of living that is represented in this data. It is not hard for many ranchers and their children to see the divergence between their income and that presented in popular culture, even if it is not presented in this stark form. Like the mill towns of New England that have been largely depopulated by changes in the economics of manufacturing, ranch communities are being depopulated by changes in the economics of beef production.

What this figure shows is that, in order to "keep up with the Joneses," ranchers must raise five times as much beef as they did in 1950. Ranchers who are able to stay in business and even prosper are those who are able to realize efficiencies of operation within the limits of the natural productivity of their holdings. This is not possible on some lands either because their natural productivity has been damaged or because the natural productivity is simply not great enough to produce a reasonable income through conversion to beef. These operations will go out of business sooner or later.

Public Land

The use of public lands for grazing complicates all these issues immensely. Public lands are just that, public. Those that use them, for whatever purpose, must acknowledge an obligation to a national constituency if they want to continue to benefit from those lands. The American people, including those displaced millworkers from New England whose children are now writing software in Seattle, may recognize the natural and deep attachment that ranchers feel for the land and their way of life, but they do not have a lot of sympathy for it.

I can think of no better way to clarify this nor no better person than the following quotation by Senator Alan Simpson, Republican of Wyoming, not a person known to be a proponent of "cow free by '93." In addressing a group advocating lawsuits to throw the federal bureaucracy out of Wyoming, Senator Simpson said:

"And as far as the bureaucracy, when you get talking about that—the public lands—you must remember that people of the United States do not believe, in any sense, that they are Wyoming lands. And they are not. They are the lands of the United States of America in total. They are not Wyoming lands. …we've got to start with the basic facts and the basic fact is that the national lands belong to the United States of America whether we like it or not. No lawsuit's going to change that, that I know of."

I believe that most Americans, the ones who own the public lands that Senator Simpson spoke of, would agree.

The wildlife of New Mexico, including endangered species, belongs to all the citizens of the state under the state constitution. This is the basis for wildlife management all across the nation and has a long basis in law and tradition. In this respect, wildlife is a public resource in the same way that public lands are, and the statements of Senator Simpson apply as well to wildlife and endangered species as to public lands.

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Lesser Prairie Chicken

The Lesser Prairie Chicken exemplifies the grass lands of the northeastern part of the state. The bird once provided a significant source of food for early settlers and more recently brought income to rural communities by providing a hunting opportunity. The range of the Lesser Prairie Chicken in New Mexico is 17% of what it once was, and the species has endured a substantial population crash in the last 10 years. I don't have any special knowledge about why populations have crashed so dramatically. An evaluation by the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish concluded that the most recent decline of the bird has been due to several causes, including oil and gas development, Shinnery Oak removal, inbreeding in small, isolated populations, and a lack of effective conservation programs, as well as non-conservative grazing, especially in conjunction with drought.

The Fish and Wildlife Service has declared that listing the Lesser Prairie Chicken as a threatened species is warranted based on information regarding the status of the species. The Lesser Prairie Chicken Interstate Working Group states: "At present, the greatest threat to populations is the continued alteration/destruction of occupied habitat." The continuing decline in the condition of our range lands does not augur well for the future of the Lesser Prairie Chicken in New Mexico.

So where does all this leave us? Public natural resources are the province of the public. Public lands and public wildlife will eventually be reclaimed by the public, and that public is increasingly urban and unfamiliar with rural issues. What is more, the public will reckon on what it has lost and will eventually hold accountable those they deem responsible for their loss. Pressure for the wise stewardship of public lands and wildlife resources, coupled with economic trends of long standing that put direct pressure on the viability of the ranching community, are forcing change in the management of range lands. That change can be resisted, but it cannot be overcome. Resistance will just magnify the long-term damage that will be done to the range resource.

It is in the best interest of all land managers, both public and private, to learn well the lessons that the land is trying to teach us. Long-term productivity and stability of these ecosystems, including the full natural diversity of plant and animal species, is not only in the interest of the public who will demand it in any case, it is in the self-interest of those who make their living from the land.

Some Thoughts on Rangeland Conditions

(con't from page 24)

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Crisis, Change, and Growth

(con't from page 23)

debt free who are still in financial trouble. Throughout the last 10 years, we could have sustained a certain level of debt, had we had a mortgage. If we did have debt to service, it would have greatly affected our management decisions, and we may have done many things differently. We could probably maintain significant debt, though at a different level of comfort.

In managing somewhat holistically, we feel that we have been able to survive in an unfavorable climate, and have the flexibility to be responsive rather than reactive to changing circumstances. For the last 10 years, we have paid our bills, lived comfortably, done a lot of skiing, and committed time and resources to our community.

We feel blessed in the opportunities we've been given, and try to make the most of those gifts.

Confessions of an Environmental Traitor

by Norm Wallen

Norm, a Flagstaff City Councilperson, is on the Executive Committee of the Grand Canyon Chapter of the Sierra Club and remains active in the Diablo Trust. This article is excerpted from an article which first appeared in the Winter 1998 issue of Range magazine.

Traitor! Strong language perhaps, but not without foundation; there are those who see me this way. The kinder of them think I've been seduced by the charm of ranching (and ranchers) and by the deviousness of group process. All because I remain an enthusiastic member of one of those collaborative groups springing up around the West. . . .

About three years ago, Dan Dagget invited me to a meeting of the recently formed Diablo Trust and I went, largely out of curiosity. I had been in Flagstaff about a year, having retired from San Francisco State University. . . .

Almost immediately, some of my preconceptions changed. Neither the ranchers nor the various agency folks fit my stereotypes of poorly informed, narrow minded defenders of past mistakes. Compared with the professors with whom I'd spent most of my life, they were, if anything, better informed and more open to a variety of views. I left the two day meeting with at least a beginning understanding of rangeland management, its problems and the potential of new approaches loosely called holistic management. . . .

For the next two years, the monthly meetings were a mixed bag for me. I enjoyed the meetings on the ranches where I could play at being a ranch hand, enjoy the beauty of this vast, brutal, fragile semi-desert and have the satisfaction of doing things that might actually improve the land. I also found great satisfaction in making friendships I would not have thought possible a few years back.

On the other hand, I found our efforts to understand each other and to formulate the very necessary rangeland goals, objectives and plans painfully slow. . . .

A crucial element in the success we have had is the building of trust. Initially, this was facilitated by seemingly endless attempts by each of the 25 or 30 members to explain who we are, why we were there and what we expected. I think this works but, to me at least, it's only a beginning. The day I really began to trust the ranchers was the day one offered to let any of us see the ranch books. The day I began to trust agency people was the day one said he'd take some risks to make things happen. I don't know when they started trusting me but I expect it was when I did something besides talk.

This raises another issue. If these groups are to accomplish anything serious, citizen enviros like me must stay involved, not just because we can make political and knowledgeable contributions, but because it is only in this way that we can build the political clout to have a major influence on land management. Without this, we all lose to the disastrous effects of "land rest"—at least here in the Southwest—or to development.

The problem is that whereas the self-interest of ranchers and agency people will keep them involved there is no such pressure on us. Just as we take no serious economic risks; we also have no responsibility except that which we choose to accept. . . .

. . .I think the answer to keeping people like me involved is demonstrated success—on the ground. Such success as restoring riparian areas must be publicized both locally and more broadly. . . .

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I think the Diablo Trust has been a major success as an organization which has not only survived but has continued to implement specific plans on the ground despite the severe drought of 1996. . . .

To date, there have been important but not major improvements on the land. Plans for major improvements are hindered by two facts of life. To date, local agencies are not empowered to make substantial land management decisions without running through bureaucratic hoops. . . .

The second obstacle is money. To date, most of the effort to improve the land has been financed by the ranches with some help from agencies for specific projects. Collaboration with university projects has provided assistance with other (principally monitoring) efforts. . . .

I am persuaded that the biggest single problem—assuming we want these ranchers to stay in business—is the burgeoning elk population which devastates grazing otherwise available to cattle. No one seems to have an answer. . . .

Another major problem is the misguided effort by some environmental groups to get all ranching off all public lands. Around here, that would be the death knell to our ranchers. They must have grazing on Forest Service and state lands to survive. . . .My hope is that all enviros will learn to distinguish among good and bad ranching and act accordingly. While litigation is sometimes necessary, much of it does nothing for the land. What it does do is spend money—at lot of it—on attorney fees and allow a few people to feel they are saving the world.

A year and a half ago, I managed to get elected to the Flagstaff City Council on a platform emphasizing our need to slow our growth. . . .

In some respects, I see the Diablo Trust as a model for our city. Despite the usual differences in views regarding "property rights vs. community rights," different opinions on the Endangered Species Act, on the role of government and on other issues, we have managed to compromise sufficiently to get on with doing what's best for the land. We have also discovered that, even on these issues, our disagreements are not as great as we thought—nor as great as exploiters of disagreement would like to have the public think. Maybe the same dynamics can help us do what's best for our city.

My experience with the Diablo Trust has convinced me that family ranching is the best hope for the rangeland of the Southwest. If they are driven out, I believe much of this land, which I love, will be either allowed to deteriorate through erosion and other symptoms of death or turned into senseless subdivisions—one long extension of the Los Angeles/Las Vegas/Phoenix disaster. . . .

Of course not all family ranchers deserve support—those who refuse to see the ravages of the past and continue to destroy the land deserve to expire. But those—and there are many of them—who are willing to change, to experiment and who really care about the land deserve our support. Beyond that, they are our best hope for preserving our magnificent rangelands and the values they encompass.

If some of my friends think I've sold out—so be it. I don't think so.

Confessions of an Environmental Traitor

(con't from page 26)

JOIN US!

Would you like to join the Quivira Coalition? We rely on donations. If you would like to help us continue our educational mission, please send your contribution with this form to our Santa Fe address.

Yes! I would like to join the Quivira Coalition. I can contribute:

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Contributions entitle you to receive this newsletter, notices of upcoming events and publications, and preference in enrollment for our Outdoor Classrooms, Conferences, and Workshops.

Thank You!

UPCOMING EVENTS

An Evening With Sid Goodloe

Wednesday, February 23, 7pm, at the Unitarian Church, 107 W. Barcelona St., Santa Fe

Sid's Carrizo Valley Ranch, located near Capitan, NM, has been a model of progressive ranch management since he began operating it in the 1960s. In 1998, Sid established the Southern Rockies Agricultural Land Trust to protect farm and ranch land in perpetuity through the use of conservation easements. Come learn from one of the most charismatic speakers in New Mexico about how good stewardship and land trusts can help create a brighter future for everyone. This **FREE** talk is co-sponsored by the Santa Fe Group of the Sierra Club.

Slide Show on The New Ranch

Albuquerque: Tuesday, March 14, 7pm at Shoney's (SE corner of Menaul & Louisiana)

Carlsbad: Tuesday, March 21, 7pm at the SPS bulding at Fox & Alameda

Courtney will be speaking at two **FREE** public events about the work of the Quivira Coalition and the concept of the New Ranch. The Albuquerque meeting is sponsored by the Mensa Society. The Carlsbad meeting is sponsored by the Chihuahan Desert Conservation Alliance. For more information, call Courtney at (505) 820-2544.

Cottonwood Planting on Macho Creek, Thursday-Saturday, March 16-18

Come out to help the New Mexico State Land Office plant cottonwood saplings along Macho Creek! The site is located near Deming, NM. This is a great opportunity to help restore a riparian area that needs trees. But we need elbow grease! Two years ago the Quivira Coalition helped the State Land Office switch the management of this riparian area . Now we need to help them to push the process of restoration along. The State Land Office will direct the work. We'll coordinate. So call Courtney if you are interested.

Surviving Drought: How Healthy Economics Flow From Healthy Land

Saturday, March 25, 9am-4 pm in Cuba, at the Senior Center on Hwy 44

At this **FREE** workshop, Kirk Gadzia will cover the principles of holistic management and ecology as they pertain to the effects of drought on rangeland. This workshop is designed to be an introduction to conservation ranching and will emphasize management techniques in drought situations. Kirk has international experience in range management and is co-author of the National Academy of Sciences book *Rangeland Health* (1994).

Monitoring Workshop: Or, How To Measure Your Success

Saturday-Sunday, April 8-9, 10am-4pm At the Sevilleta Wildlife Refuge (north of Socorro)

This workshop, led by Jeff Herrick , will introduce participants to the quantitative monitoring system developed by the USDA's Jornada Experimental Range (in cooperation with the EPA, NRCS, and BLM). The system focusses on key indicators of ecosystem health and sustainability. It is flexible and can be adapted to a wide variety of management objectives. The workshop will cover monitoring objectives, site selection, indicator selection, measurement procedures (including soil, vegetation and photo points), and indicator interpretation. **Cost:** $50 per person. Price includes two lunches, provided by the Quivira Coalition. Housing is available at the Refuge (rooms are fully equipped, including kitchens). Cost for housing is $10 person, at two persons per room. Space is limited. Priority will be given to Quivira Coalition members.

The Quivira Coalition
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