

Through a local young rancher focus group, feedback was given on what outreach topics they were most interested in and from whom they preferred to get information. Overwhelmingly, they said they were hungry for management concepts which were practical and that could be immediately implemented upon returning home.

Perhaps not surprising, when asked about educational programming, they were most interested in offerings from people with real world experience. The majority preferred actual producers presenting their experience.

The following list highlights several key activities from the last three years which were aimed primarily at the beginning farmers and ranchers of the Central Kansas Extension District. In carrying out these programmatic efforts, I attempted to align my educational objectives with the simple “wants” outlined by the focus group: timely applied content and/or practitioner delivery.

- In September of 2018, I partnered with the Kansas Alliance for Wetlands & Streams to host “Grazing Management for Improved Soil Health”. This program featured nationally recognized rancher and consultant Jim Gerrish. Educational objectives: Improve Grazing Management based on ecological processes, develop off-stream livestock water systems, and implement cost-effective fencing for riparian and wetland management. The focus of the meeting was to help young producers understand the importance of plant-soil-animal interactions on both natural resources and their bottom lines. There were nearly 75 people in attendance from Kansas, Colorado and Oklahoma.
- As a former ag lender, I saw a need for a farm financial skills workshop. My educational objective was to develop and deliver a four-part series designed to help young farm and ranch operators better understand their financial records, analyze the performance of their businesses, have more meaningful conversations with their lenders, and, ultimately, take ownership of their livelihoods.

Held from December 2018 through March 2019, the topics were designed to orient with the timing of their necessity as follows: "Balance Sheet Basics" in December, "Cash Flow Analysis" in January, "Ratios and Renewals" in February and, in March, we wrapped up with "Ag Finance Tools and Resources". Throughout the series, participants had the opportunity to work through a case study and play the role of a banker.

Overall, there were 27 young producers engaged in the series. After completing the program, 100% of the respondents felt like they had the necessary skills to prepare financial statements on their own prior to meeting with their lender. With a ranking of 1 (low) to 5 (high), respondents indicated that they had improved, in all areas, an average of almost two scale points (from 1.75 to 3.625). They felt like the most important concepts that they learned were budgeting and cash flow, understanding the meaning and use of performance ratios and available ag financing products.

Since the series, I have continued to see an incremental uptick in the requests for individual assistance with farm finances using the FINPACK software. People are starting to pay more attention to the chore of bookkeeping and not making it an afterthought.

- In collaboration with the Kansas Graziers Association, I hosted a community conversation around "Profitable Ranching: Is it possible?" This March 2019 event drew over 80 people in for a full day of information from two well-known ranchers. Burke Teichert, retired general manager of Deseret Land & Cattle, spoke on "The Answer is YES!" and Dale Strickler, Kansas rancher and agronomist, offered "Management Tips to Survive the Current Economy." Attendees gained valuable knowledge on everything from more effective grazing schemes to employee management.

- I did a two-location "coffee shop talk" on forage testing in September 2019. The educational objective was to convey to new and beginning ranchers the value of forage sampling, how to use proper sampling protocols, what test(s) should be ordered, how to compare Wet-Chemistry to NIRS testing and how to interpret and use lab results. 100% of the evaluation respondents said they found the information presented valuable or very valuable. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being low and 5 being high, they felt their understanding of and comfort level with proper sampling methods increased from 3.1 to 4.3 while their understanding of and comfort level with interpreting and using the forage report increased from 2.2 to 4.0. In follow up, after the coffee shop meetings, annual feed sample submissions through the two local Extension offices nearly doubled.

- In December 2019, with partnership from the Kansas Grazing Lands Coalition, I held a cover crops economics workshop. Educational objectives: basic introduction to soil health and the nutrient cycle, economics of cover crops and a review of local case studies which supported the numbers. To wrap up the day, we surveyed the 52 attendees on how they saw cover crops benefitting their operations. Here's what several had to say:
 - Drought Resiliency
 - Improving bottom line with less inputs.
 - Being able to run more cattle on the same amount of acres.
 - Reduce feeding costs, herbicide and erosion. Improve soil structure and infiltration.
 - Recover lost fertility and restore nutrient cycles.

Since the meeting, there have been many more requests for assistance in converting cropland to grazing or simply better utilizing their tilled acres. We are also seeing more crop producers wanting to utilize grazing, but not wanting to buy cattle, work with neighboring young livestock owners on lease agreements.

- In January 2020, I hosted a calving school with a veterinarian. Educational objectives: expose beginning ranchers to valuable information on the stages of the normal calving process, tips to handle difficult calving situations, and when and how to intervene to assist cows and young heifers. These concepts were all enhanced through the use of a life-sized cow and calf model. Participants also received tips on environmental considerations for cow/calf health and performance. We had 102 cattle producers in actual attendance. The surprising part was that I also utilized Facebook Live for the very first time and, as a result, had an additional 50 folks tune in to the live stream and then ANOTHER 3,200 viewed part or all of the recording over the next few weeks!!! Upon evaluation at the conclusion of the event, 88% of the respondents planned to make moderate to significant changes in the calving assistance that they provide in the future. Of those, 87% planned to change when they assist and 88% planned to change the manner or technique in which they provide assistance. Overall, 94% of the respondents believed the information that they gained at this program would lead to an increase in the percentage of live calves at weaning. In addition, 75% estimated that the economic impact of this to their operation would be at least \$100 with 23% expecting at least \$1,000 of impact.

Cooperative partnerships and collaboration made these educational opportunities possible. Through established relationships with various businesses, agricultural organizations, and governmental agencies, additional expertise was committed, expanded networks were leveraged for promotion, and cost recovery was secured.

While participant registration fees had to be relied upon in many instances, the larger events that required a larger budget were either partially or fully underwritten by sponsor and/or grant funding – most notably a multi-year USDA-NRCS Kansas Conservation Collaboration Grant designed specifically for outreach to underserved farmers and ranchers while connecting them with USDA programs and services.