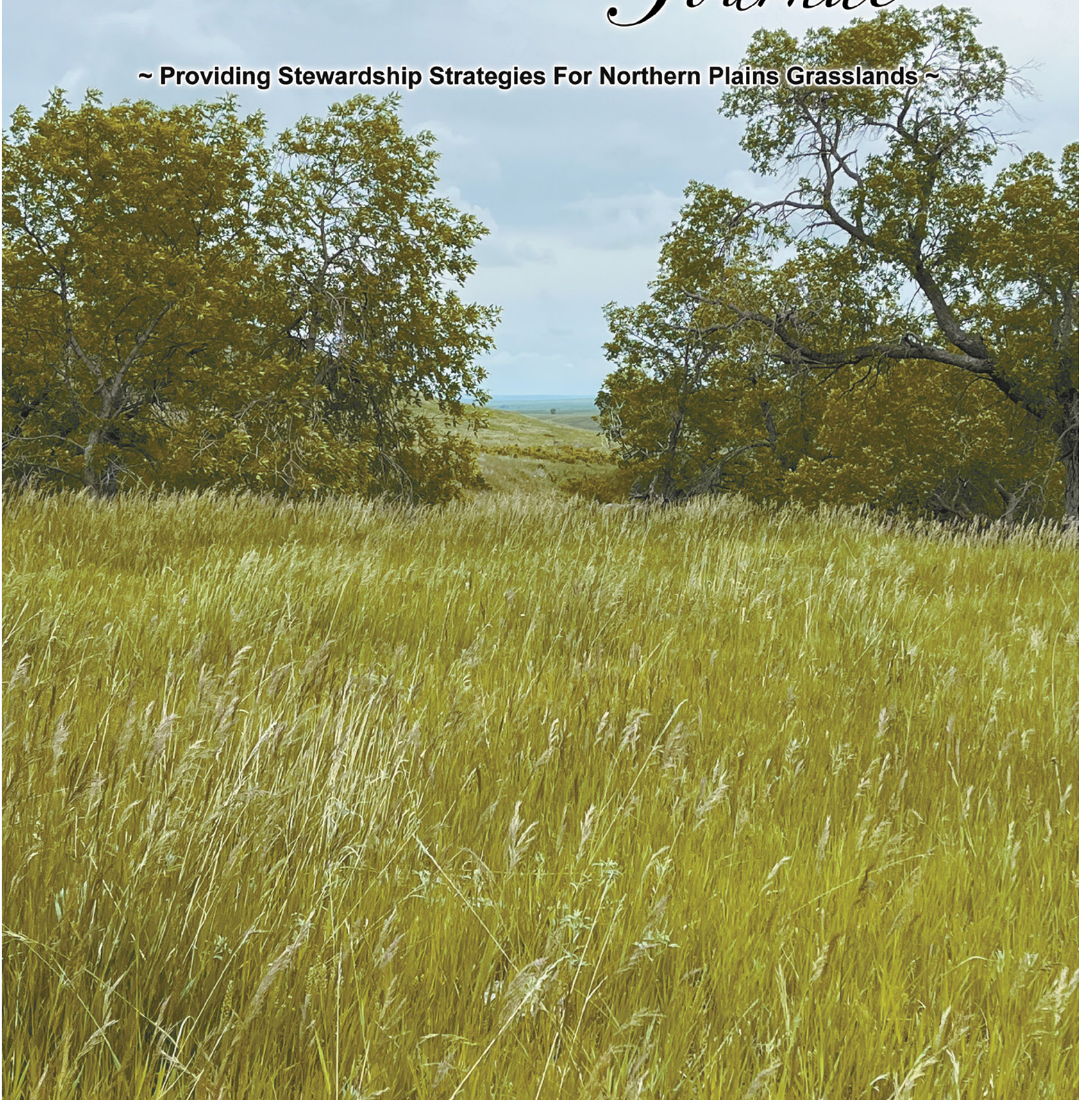


**June 2025**

# RANGE & PASTURE *Journal*

~ Providing Stewardship Strategies For Northern Plains Grasslands ~



Range & Pasture Journal is sponsored  
by the S.D. Grassland Coalition and  
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# Nebraska Grazing Lands Coalition Offers Scholarships to Support Generational Transition in Agriculture

The Nebraska Grazing Lands Coalition (NGLC) is proud to announce the continuation of its Financial and Educational Assistance Programs, aimed at supporting producers through the vital process of generational transition planning.

Through the generous support of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Conservation Partners Program, NGLC offers two types of scholarships:

- Educational Scholarships: Up to \$500 for individuals attending events focused on generational transition topics.
- Financial Assistance Scholarships: Designed to help cover expenses such as estate planning or mediator fees.

Each year, ten scholarships are awarded per category, providing critical support to producers preparing for the future of their operations.

"These programs help ensure that producers have access to the tools and resources needed for successful generational transitions," said Angela NGLC Assistant Director. "We're committed to supporting Nebraska's grazing land stewards in sustaining family operations for years to come."

To learn more, access resources on generational transition planning or to apply for one of our scholarships, visit [nebraskagrazinglands.org](http://nebraskagrazinglands.org).

For questions, contact Angela at [angela@nebraskagrazinglands.org](mailto:angela@nebraskagrazinglands.org).

## What's Happening Next?

The Nebraska Grazing Lands Coalition is grateful to Jim Gerrish, The McGinn Ranch and the community of Anselmo for making the June grazing school possible.

There will be another grazing school Sept. 16-18 in Sidney, Neb. Producers are encouraged to attend.

There are other NGLC events coming up to take part in as well.

Sept. 2 and Oct 22 the Coalition is hosting a webinar series that will focus on Long Term Care Planning and Conflict Resolution.

A Farm and Ranch Succession Workshop will be held Dec. 2 in Kimball, Neb.

Find out more about these events at [nebraskagrazinglands.org](http://nebraskagrazinglands.org).



Another grazing school is planned for Sept. 16-18 in Sidney, Neb.

## 25th Anniversary for Neb. Grazing Conference

The 2025 Nebraska Grazing Conference (NGC) is the 25th Annual Conference in the long history of serving Nebraska's graziers, a history that began at the first conference in Kearney, Neb., on Aug. 13-14, 2001. It began as a vision of Terry Gompert and Bob Scriven (Nebraska Extension Educators) who recognized a need to serve "ranchers, farmers, wildlife managers, conservation groups, and advisers who wanted to make grazing a profitable enterprise" and manage our grasslands

in a sustainable way. An exploratory meeting was convened by the Center for Grassland Studies, University of Nebraska-Lincoln on October 20, 2000. Dr. Martin Massengale, Founding Director of the Center for Grassland Studies, Dr. Bruce Anderson, Department of Agronomy and Horticulture, and Dr. Rick Rasby, Department of Animal Science, led the discussion. As a result of the overwhelming response from a variety of producers, professional organizations, and state and feder-




al agencies, the Nebraska Grazing Conference Coordinating Committee was established with members representing the diversity of those expressing an interest in a statewide grazing conference. The Center for Grassland Studies was identified as the conference's host organization.

Register online at <https://grassland.unl.edu/nebraska-grazing-conference-registration>.

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## Grazing TidBit

Based on research, a cow prefers to take approximately 15,000 healthy bites per day.



WE ARE "GRAZING LAND LOVERS" THROUGH AND THROUGH dedicated to the enhancement of grassland by creating public awareness and improvement of the grazing lands in Nebraska. NGLC's focus is to provide voluntary technical assistance and educational opportunities on grazing land management. Healthy Nebraska grazing lands translate directly into forage for livestock, habitat for wildlife, economic benefits for landowners and rural communities, and clean water for much of the Great Plains.

We offer consultation and educational programs to provide training on the value of grassland stewardship and mentoring programs that allow grassland management to be handed down to the next generation of farmers and ranchers. Call us now to find out how you can join others on our quest to preserve Nebraska's grasslands. Contact the NGLC to participate in our Rangeland Monitoring Program (RMP).

308-872-1250 • [www.nebraskagrazinglands.org](http://www.nebraskagrazinglands.org)

Photo by Steve and Bobbi Olson



## NEBRASKA Grazing Lands Coalition

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**LinkedIn** Nebraska Grazing Lands Coalition

The Nebraska Grazing Lands Coalition (NGLC) is a part of a national effort to enhance the resource stewardship and success of grazing land-dependent operations. Objectives of the NGLC board, made up of mostly ranchers, are to strengthen partnerships, promote volunteer assistance and participation, and promote education, training, appreciation, advocacy, and public awareness of the 23 million acres of grazing lands in Nebraska.

Specific projects include sponsoring statewide grazing educational opportunities, collaboration with other partners and agencies focused on grazing management, promotion of farm and ranch transition planning and education, and advocacy for the stewardship of Nebraska's grasslands.



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## “A unified voice for managing South Dakota’s grass resource”

The Coalition’s goal is to provide local leadership and guidance in a cooperative effort, and provide information and technical assistance to grassland managers.

By focusing the collective power of resource management agencies, producer organizations, educational institutions, professional societies, environmental organizations and private grassland managers, much can be accomplished.

To that end, the Coalition is a major partner in the Grassland Management and Planning Project. For more detailed information on this project, visit [sdconservation.org](http://sdconservation.org) and click on Grassland.

To become a member, clip and mail the form below with your payment.

### SD GRASSLAND COALITION MEMBERSHIP - \$30/yr or \$55/2 yrs.

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## Consider Attending These Events

June has been a busy month for the South Dakota Grassland Coalition with the annual bird tour and one of three grazing schools happening. Good crowds were had for both.

Coming up yet this summer on July 15 is a Pasture Walk at the Rasmussen 33 Ranch, Belvidere, S.D. It will be a time to see different plant varieties and discuss grazing management practices.

Aug. 11 is the South Dakota Leopold Tour at the Stomprud Ranch near Mud Butte, S.D. The Stomprud Family is recipients of the 2025 Leopold Conservation Award.

Larry, and his wife Eileen, manage Stom-

prud Angus Ranch’s 6,600 acres with their son Jay, his wife Jennifer, and their three grandchildren: Elijah, Kaira, and Joshua. Aside from 700 acres of hay production, they rotationally graze registered seed-stock Angus and commercial cows on the ranch’s rangeland.

You will want to attend the tour to learn more about the Stompruds’ land ethic and different practices they have put in place.

The June Grazing school has happened but there are still two more chances to attend a school yet this summer. There will be one held July 22-27 at Summit, S.D. and another Sept. 9-11 in



## DID YOU KNOW?

When you attend a Grazing School, you get **free** personalized consulting.



Upon completing any of the **3 grazing schools**, you can request a consultant to come to your ranch and **help you with a grazing management plan** that suits your specific needs.

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Chamberlain, S.D. After completing the Grazing School, attendees are then eligible to enroll in the Follow-up Range Consulting program. A range consultant will come to your ranch and help implement improved grazing practices taught at the School. The fee for Follow-Up is included in the Grazing School tuition. The Grassland Coalition procures grants that make this low-cost investment possible.

## At Home on the Range Bird Tour



SDGC At Home on the Range Tour was held at Totton Angus Ranch during the last weekend of May. Totton Angus Ranch is run by Charlie and Tanya Totton with their daughter Courtney Tyrrell and her husband Jonathan. Charlie Totton (at left) talks about his grazing overlooking the Missouri River.



Courtney Tyrrell and Charlie Totton presented the history and current management along with the future of their operation



Even the kids get in on the Plant ID during the Range Tour.

## On the Cover:

A mix of old and new grass in a photo taken in a Meade County, S.D. pasture.





## GRASSLAND COALITION

“A Unified voice for managing South Dakota’s grass resource.”



For information contact Judge Jessop • 605-280-0127  
[judge.jessop@sdconservation.net](mailto:judge.jessop@sdconservation.net) • [www.sdgrass.org](http://www.sdgrass.org)

## Upcoming Events

**July 22-24**  
Grazing School,  
Summit, SD

**August 11**  
SD Leopold Tour,  
Stomprud Ranch,  
Mud Butte, SD

**September 9-11**  
Grazing School,  
Chamberlain, SD



# Snapshots of the recent Nebraska Grazing School



LAURA NELSON-STATEWIDE GRASSLANDS COORDINATOR NGLC  
The Nebraska Grazing Lands Coalition hosted its summer grazing school June 9-10 in the Anselmo area.



Jim Gerrish provided instruction for the two-day event.



The McGinn Ranch provided the ranch host location for the event.



Note taking and calculations are all part of the school.



Part of what makes the grazing schools popular is the hands-on field experience the participants get.



Different grass species were identified throughout the school.

## Stay flexible when grazing through varied conditions

By Janelle Atyeo  
For South Dakota Soil Health Coalition

Will there be enough forage for the herd? When will it rain?

Agriculture producers are often called upon to make decisions without having all the necessary information. Weather is hard to predict by more than a few days, so producers need to have plans in place for several different potential scenarios.

With much of South Dakota still experiencing drought conditions, it's a good idea for cattle producers to map out a long-term plan to steer their herd through the summer grazing season while staying flexible to changing conditions on the landscape.

"It's really all about keeping your forage supply and your forage demand in balance," said Kaylee Wheeler, range management field specialist for South Dakota State University Extension based in Winner.

Extended dry conditions have hurt pasture growth across the state, making it important for producers to manage grazing closely and have a flexible plan with certain trigger dates to implement it.

Most parts of South Dakota saw less than half of their normal precipitation between October and April. Fall rains that pastures need to recover from the grazing season never came, and winter snow cover was scarce, further contributing to dry soils.

"We consider every year is going to be a drought year," said Jim Faulstich. "It's a fact of life."

At his Daybreak Ranch near Highmore in central South Dakota, he saw the worst of it in 1976.

Since that major drought and the tough decisions that came with it nearly 50 years ago, his operation has relied on extensive plans to manage grazing. They take stock of pasture conditions and the long-range precipitation outlook while keeping an eye on factors off the ranch that might impact availability of forage and the price of cattle.

Just before May 1, Faulstich was getting ready to send his last group of cattle, his yearlings, to pasture. Those yearlings allow flexibility in his grazing plan. This year, an early April snow and late April rain helped pastures green up a bit. On the driest years when forage is scarce, yearlings won't go to pasture.

"We have in mind that we can send those down the road or dry lot them to not overgraze our resources," Faulstich said.

High cattle prices make this a good time to get rid of cows with problems such as bad feet, bad bags or a poor disposition, Wheeler said. Producers could also consider weaning early, which cuts a cow's nutrition requirements by 30%, according to the range specialist.

"Just by stopping her lactation, you can save a lot of grazing days," she said.

Overgrazing can hurt production in subsequent years. Cattle don't just mow down the

green blades of grass as they munch. Without leaves, a plant needs to pull energy from its root stores to regrow. A smaller root biomass loses its ability to hold the soil together, take in water and exchange nutrients, Wheeler said.

A healthy pasture needs plant material to shade the soil from extreme temperatures and shield it from wind and water erosion. Keeping the soil covered and maintaining a living root are some of the core principles of good soil health.

"Soil health and grass production goes hand in hand," said Faulstich, who serves as vice chairman of the South Dakota Grassland Coalition.

Managing for a diversity of plants is another principle of soil health. Faulstich targets grazing to encourage growth of deep-rooted native species. A mix of species will have plants ready for grazing at different points in the season, giving livestock access to nutritious, green forage through the grazing season. A pasture dominated by just crested wheat grass or smooth brome grass, on the other hand, will mature quickly. Those introduced cool season grasses are the first to turn brown in the summer.

"You're really limited nutritionally if that's all that you have there," Wheeler said.

Rest and recovery are also important aspects of grazing management. An ideal year at Daybreak Ranch will have cattle on an 80-acre pasture for three to five days of grazing, then the grass will rest for 365 days.



USDA-NRSC SOUTH DAKOTA PHOTO  
Jim Faulstich uses regenerative grazing practices on his Daybreak Ranch near Highmore, SD, to improve rangeland biodiversity, promote soil health, provide wildlife habitat, and increase forage production. He has a grazing plan already established for years when drought conditions become too severe.

"We try not to graze a pasture more than once a year," Faulstich said.

Drought makes it harder for pastures to recover from grazing. In sandy soils, it can take three years or more for a pasture to recover from overgrazing, Wheeler said. Be careful not to take too much forage and not to graze before the grass is ready, she said. Producers can track growth in their area with South Dakota Mesonet's Growing Degree Day tool.

Another resource for monitoring range conditions in South Dakota and creating a grazing plan is available at the Natural Resources Conservation Service Range & Pasture website: [www.nrcs.usda.gov/conservation-by-state/south-dakota/range-pasture](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/conservation-by-state/south-dakota/range-pasture).

Producers might also find resources in their neighbors. The South Dakota Soil Health Coalition maintains the South Dakota Grazing Exchange at [sdgrazing-exchange.com](http://sdgrazing-exchange.com). Producers with pastures, cover crops or crop residue to graze can connect with livestock producers looking for forage.

Especially in times of drought, working out a grazing plan far in advance can lighten some of the mental load in decision making.

"It's so much easier to make decisions now while you still have options than to wait and be forced into a decision that you didn't want to do," Wheeler said.

"Much of South Dakota still has below-normal soil moisture levels, and we can't predict how much rain we'll get this season. Having a plan for dry conditions in place now can relieve stress and make it easy to make good decisions for our land and our operations when the time is right," South Dakota Soil Health Coalition Executive Director Cindy Zenk said. "If we base that plan on regenerative grazing practices, we can maximize our available forage while protecting our grasslands and improving our soil."

For more information about regenerative range management, visit [www.sdsoilhealthcoalition.org](http://www.sdsoilhealthcoalition.org).

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# Sharing the Conservation Story

By Codi Vallery-Mills

He has traveled the world capturing some of the most terrific landscapes with his camera and yet the one place that sits prominently in his mind as one of the most spectacular is South Dakota.

But if you ask him what's the most amazing thing he has ever seen he will tell you it was in the early morning hours on the Limpert Ranch near Bison, S.D. for an Our Amazing Grassland story. "We're going and they're opening the gate and the headlights are illuminating the grassland, and there's that light blue that the sun isn't up yet, and all of a sudden the sun starts clipping and there's just, as far as you can see, there's just buffalo and no power lines and nothing except grasslands and buffalo. That had such an impact on me," says Joe Dickie.

Dickie is an accomplished photographer and videographer. His career has led him to the wedding aisle where he spent years as a

wedding photographer, then on to commercial work with corporate accounts like General Mills, Nature Valley, and Dunn Brothers Coffee. Time as a senior director at the American Outdoor Group led him to the swamps and duck blinds of Louisiana with reality TV personalities found on Swamp People and Duck Dynasty. In 2013 he began to focus on telling conservation stories of today's farmers and ranchers. Clients have The Nature Conservancy, the South Dakota Grassland Coalition, and Ducks Unlimited among others.

He has become a staple in telling South Dakota's conservation story over the past decade. Dickie's video work can be found on several YouTube channels while still footage is used in calendars and promotional materials.

He acknowledges he has found a purpose in his conservation work. "I just looked at my old passport and there wasn't a page that wasn't completely filled up with stamps from traveling all over the world for different companies and different

stories and just really, really cool stuff," Dickie says. "But it's funny how as you do years and years of it, you sort of settle on something that really fills you up, and that's what South Dakota and the conservation stories have become for me."

The U.S. is losing grasslands at a staggering rate, which concerns Dickie. "If we don't slow the loss of the grassland, the entire plant is in trouble. And probably one of, if not, the best way to make change is through education," he says.

Dickie says he captures farmers and ranchers, agency experts, and university staff talking about what can be done to make a difference. "So, I am hopeful the stories we're telling will help bring about some change."

Change doesn't have to be all at once he says noting small scale projects are impactful. Currently, he is working with South Dakota State University's Every Acre Counts program. "That's connecting with farmers and looking at areas that are marginal for cropland and planting them back to grass so that we

have more habitat and grasslands." He also just started a similar project with Ducks Unlimited, promoting planting marginal cropland back to grasses. Both are working lands projects where the rancher or farmer is still able to utilize their acreage.

Dickie says a lot of what he hopes his videos and photos are doing is connecting farmers and ranchers to make them aware of what others in the ag industry are doing. "Beyond that, I think what is even more important is getting these stories out to the people in the cities, the consumers, really, the people that are needed to support the folks that are boots on the ground making changes because we can't expect to put the weight of the world on the shoulders of farmers and ranchers and really just expect that they're going to lose income and make the changes that are better for the environment," Dickie notes.

## Rancher Connection

Farmers and ranchers tend to be a fiercely inde-



Joe Dickie is the man behind the lens for many of the South Dakota Grassland Coalition's videos and photography.

pendent, wary type bunch so getting them to open up in front of a camera to talk about themselves can seem daunting. Dickie, a Minnesota native, says 10 years into it he has a better understanding of ranch life – the work, the grasslands, the finances, the seasons, and the emotions attached to it all. "I've always really been able to connect with people and show them my heart, show them my emotion, and really help them understand that I'm committed to telling their story in a way that makes them proud."

Dickie says he was just told in a recent interview he did that with grasslands one has to be an observer. With mountains the awe factor is

immediate. With the prairie you have to slow down and look at the life above and below the soil, he says.

"There's very few things cooler than a dung beetle with one of those large rollers. I don't know how many times I've probably walked by them over the years. But if you stop and you find them and you watch them, it's just crazy. This life that's just right there on top of the soil doing cool things. So, that's to say, it doesn't need to be large scale...it can be very small scale and it still takes your breath away."

*This article first appeared in October 2024 Cattle Business Herd Reference Guide.*

# 2025 Drought Planning Trigger Dates

By Ryan Benjamin, T.L. Meyer, Nebraska Extension Educators

Most cattle are turned out on summer pastures now. There has been rainfall received in recent weeks throughout the region but there are pockets of severe drought in both South Dakota and Nebraska yet.

Pasture and native rangeland forage production fluctuates greatly through time due to precipitation, temperature, rangeland health, and soil nutrients. The amount and timing of spring and early summer precipitation is an important factor in determining annual plant production. Using critical trigger dates can help producers adjust stocking rates if precipitation, and the resulting forage production, is expected to be below average. Trigger dates will vary depending on the dominant forage.

## Suggested Trigger Dates

Trigger dates for an operation will depend on the grass species present and available grazing resources. Here are some key trigger dates to look back on and future ones to consider for western Nebraska cool- and warm- season dominated range sites.

**April 1.** Look at previous growing season precipitation and dormant season precipitation from October – March. Digging post holes can be a good test for observing how much moisture is in the soil profile. A lack of soil moisture in early to mid-April will impact growth from cool-season grass species such as Threadleaf sedge (black-root) and Needlegrasses. With exceptionally dry conditions at this time, and forecasts for drier than normal May and June precipitation, potential reductions in stocking rates of 10-20% on cool-season dominated

rangeland may be appropriate.

**April 15 to May 10.** By this time, 30–45-day precipitation forecasts can have a moderate level of reliability. If above average temperatures with average to below average precipitation is predicted, additional reductions in stocking rates should be considered. In smooth brome-grass pastures with below average precipitation, annual production may be reduced 25-50%.

**May 20 to June 10.** Needlegrasses will be completing their forage production and western wheatgrass is in its rapid growth window. If March-May precipitation was 50-75% of the long-term average, reduce stocking rates 30-40% or more depending upon grass species and plant health. Warm-season grasses such as prairie sandreed and little bluestem are just starting to grow.

**June 15 to June 30.** Approximately 75-90% of

grass growth on cool-season dominated range sites and 50% of grass growth on warm-season dominated range sites will have happened. Rainfall after late June results in limited benefit to cool-season grass production but could still benefit warm-season grasses.

**June 15 to July 15.** Precipitation and available soil moisture are important for warm-season grass growth.

**July 15.** Precipitation after this date will have limited benefit to warm-season tallgrass production but can still



T.L. MEYER  
The amount and timing of spring and early summer precipitation is an important factor in determining annual plant production.

result in some forage growth from shortgrass warm-season species such as buffalograss and blue grama.

**September 1 to September 15.** Smooth

brome-grass or other cool-season dominated pastures need adequate precipitation by these dates for enough fall forage growth to be grazed.

# Grazing Guide

A calendar listing of pasture and range events

<b>July 8-11</b> Young Adult Ranching for Profit, Burwell, Neb.	<b>Sept. 2</b> Webinar series from Nebraska Grazing Lands Coalition. Topic Long Term Care Planning
<b>July 15</b> Pasture Walk, Rasmussen 33 Ranch, Belvidere, S.D. RSVP to Jenita at jenita1204@gmail.com, 308-201-0065	<b>Sept 9-11</b> Grazing School, Chamberlain, S.D.
<b>July 22-24</b> Grazing School, Summit, S.D.	<b>Sept. 16-18</b> Nebraska Grazing School, Sidney, Neb.
<b>July 22-24</b> Women on the Range Grazing Workshop, Faith, S.D.	<b>Oct. 22</b> Webinar series from Nebraska Grazing Lands Coalition. Topic Conflict Resolution
<b>Aug. 1</b> Roots & Ranching Road Show, Higgins Cattle Co, Leola, S.D.	<b>Dec. 2</b> Farm and Ranch Succession Workshop, KCTS Conference Center, Kimball, Neb.
<b>Aug. 5-8</b> 25th Annual Nebraska Grazing Conference, Younes Convention Center, Kearney, Neb.	<b>Dec. 4-5</b> S.D. Grassland Coalition Annual Conference
<b>Aug. 11</b> S.D. Leopold Tour, Stomprud Ranch, Mud Butte, S.D.	

Have a Range & Pasture Event you would like others to know about?  
Send information to cattlenews@gwtc.net.

Visit these organizations online:

**Nebraska Grazing Lands Coalition**  
[www.nebraskagrazinglands.org](http://www.nebraskagrazinglands.org)

**South Dakota Grassland Coalition**  
[www.sdgrass.org](http://www.sdgrass.org)







# Writing & Using a Grazing Management Plan

A grazing management plan serves as a roadmap for improving ranch productivity and helps producers efficiently allocate forage across their land. Grazing plans help producers anticipate and prepare for risks, take advantage of market opportunities, coordinate grazing with family schedules and ranch operations, and make efficient use of every acre of the ranch.

### Writing your Grazing Management Plan:

Draw or print a detailed map of pastures. Write out information on top of the image including pasture names, for-

age types, total acres and grazeable acres (accounting for brush, water bodies and infrastructure).

On a spreadsheet, record your pasture names or numbers, including information about the number of grazeable acres. Use rows across the top to record days and columns on the left to record pasture names and information. See the QR code below to use Noble's grazing plan template.

On a separate document, write down all of your current livestock enterprises, including herd sizes, animal weights and animal unit calculations.

Make a note of important dates and events throughout the year that will impact livestock movement, including family or staff vacations, livestock weaning periods or maintenance projects.

Consider and write out your specific decision points for both risk management (like drought responses) and opportunity-taking (like favorable market conditions).

Example 1: If rainfall is below normal, measure forage and de-stock.

Example 2: If goat prices exceed \$3.50 per pound sell culls immediately.

Noble's Tips for Enhancing Your Grazing

### Management Plan:

Use color coding to track different livestock types (e.g., blue for cattle, green for goats).

Calculate "herd days per pasture" to determine how long livestock can graze each area.

Consider leader-follower grazing scenarios when managing multiple species of livestock.

Account for seasonal variations and infrastructure projects that might affect grazing patterns.

### Using Your Grazing Management Plan:

Review your plan regularly, and adapt it as needed. It should be a dynamic, living document



NOBLE Your grazing management plan should be a dynamic, living document that responds when the conditions on your ranch change.

that responds when the conditions on your ranch change.

Hold yourself accountable to reviewing your plan at least quarterly, in unison with calculating

point-in-time available forage on your ranch to help you make data-driven decisions.

— Noble Research Institute

## Bush Foundation Partners with DU to Support Grass-Based Agriculture in South Dakota

Ducks Unlimited (DU) and its conservation partners are expanding efforts to restore grasslands in South Dakota thanks to a \$787,500 Community Innovation grant from the Bush Foundation. This funding enhances the scale and impact of the existing Working Grasslands Partnership (WGP) between DU and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), among other organizations. Over the next five years, the partnership aims to collaborate with farmers and ranchers to restore 25,000 acres of grassland in South Dakota. These working lands will provide economic support to local producers and communities while fostering diversity in both the agri-

cultural system and the ecosystem.

"Through our Community Innovation program, we fund the most promising ideas, across issue areas, that have the potential to make our region better for everyone," shared Rudy Guglielmo, grantmaking officer at the Bush Foundation. "We also work to inspire, equip, and connect leaders in the spirit of true collaboration. Great ideas spread through people. The many organizations coming together to help farmers and ranchers through the Working Grasslands Partnership are doing meaningful and important work for people, communities, and wildlife habitat."

The Bush Foundation works through open grantmaking to fund the development and spread of great ideas, making large commitments to ensure those ideas get the support needed for success. The Foundation recognizes the WGP as an innovative model for regional conservation of grasslands designed to benefit farmers and ranchers throughout South Dakota.

"This is a win-win for producers and wildlife," says Bruce Toay, Manager of Conservation Programs for Ducks Unlimited in South Dakota. "By working with farmers and ranchers, we are improving soil health, livestock forage, habitat for wildlife, and enhancing the state's landscapes

for future generations. I would like to recognize and thank the Bush Foundation for investing in this program."

Grass-based agriculture is well-suited to the soil types and terrain of South Dakota and can serve as an effective alternative for managing marginal soils. With the up-front cost share and technical assistance provided in this partnership, a productive mosaic of cash crops, forage crops, grasslands, wetlands, and livestock are possible. Participating landowners can expect to transition marginal cropland soils to healthy grasslands, improve water quality and soil health, and enhance habitat for grassland birds. Furthermore, livestock



Participating landowners can expect to transition marginal cropland soils to healthy grasslands, improve water quality and soil health, and enhance habitat for grassland birds.

operations will financially benefit from improved program practices.

### How to Apply

During the 10-year commitment, participants receive incentive payments during years one to three of the initial grass establishment phase. Technical assistance for seeding plans and infrastructure support for grazing systems

is also provided. After year three, landowners can utilize the re-established grasslands for grazing and haying.

South Dakota farmers and ranchers interested in participating in the program can learn more or request an application by visiting [ag.ducks.org](http://ag.ducks.org) or contacting one of the WGP partner organizations listed below.

## USDA Designates Nebraska Counties as Natural Disaster Areas Due to Drought

The USDA has designated several counties in Nebraska as Natural Disaster Areas due to the prolonged drought in the state.

This Secretarial natural disaster designation allows the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) to extend much-needed emergency credit to producers recovering from natural disasters through emergency loans. Emergency loans can be used to meet various recovery needs including the replacement of essential items such as equipment or livestock, reorganization of a farming operation, or to refinance certain debts. FSA will review the loans based

on the extent of losses, security available, and repayment ability.

According to the U.S. Drought Monitor, these counties suffered from a drought intensity value during the growing season of 1) D2 Drought-Severe for 8 or more consecutive weeks or 2) D3 Drought-Extreme or D4 Drought-Exceptional.

Primary Counties Eligible:

State: Nebraska: Counties include Blaine, Brown, Dawson, Deuel, Hooker, Kimball, Lincoln, Logan, McPherson, Platte, Rock and Thomas

Contiguous Counties Also Eligible:

State: Nebraska: Counties include Arthur,

Banner, Boone, Boyd, Buffalo, Butler, Cherry, Cheyenne, Colfax, Custer, Frontier, Garden, Gosper, Grant, Hayes, Holt, Keith, Keya Paha, Loup, Madison, Merrick, Nance, Perkins, Phelps, Polk, and Stanton

State: Colorado: Counties include Logan, Sedgwick, and Weld

State: Wyoming: Counties include Laramie

On farmers.gov, the Disaster Assistance Discovery Tool, Disaster Assistance-at-a-Glance fact sheet, and Loan Assistance Tool can help you determine program or loan options. To file a Notice of Loss or to ask questions about available programs, contact your local USDA Service Center.

## Nebraska Grazing Lands Coalition

Webinar series

### Save the DATES

#### September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 12pm CST

Topic: Long Term Care Planning

#### October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 12pm CST

Topic: Conflict Resolution



Scan the QR code for more event information

<https://nebraskagrazinglands.org/Events>





# Navigating Farm Succession Without a Family Heir: Embracing Change and Coping with Loss

by Jessica Groskopf

*“Every day when I would leave for work, and again when I would come home, I would walk past our key basket at the front door and see his keys in there. Walking past that basket was this constant little reminder that he was deployed, (physically gone), you know, overseas, but he was always here with me, (psychologically present), in my thoughts.”*

A colleague of mine shared this story with me about her personal experience embracing change and coping with an ambiguous loss during her spouse’s deployment in 2010. Hearing that story got me thinking — what are those transitions, those moments, that give us that same feeling? And especially when we’re looking at big changes, like what happens when there isn’t anyone willing to take over the farm or ranch?

In my work with agricultural families, I’m increasingly encountering a difficult but growing reality: many farms and ranches today have not identified a successor from within their family.

This absence of the next generation can simultaneously simplify some aspects of estate planning while deeply complicating others, particularly the emotional side of grieving the end of era.

This article marks the beginning of a new series aimed at helping farm and ranch owners who are facing this crossroads. Over the coming articles, I’ll explore essential steps such as the legal documents you’ll need, identifying suitable non-family successors, and tools that can make the transition smoother. While I’m not sure yet how many articles this series will include, your questions and feedback will help shape its direction, I do know where I want to begin: with the emotional toll that this situation can take.

For many, the idea of not passing the family operation on to a family member isn’t just a logistical transition, it’s a deeply personal loss. This feeling often manifests as ambiguous loss, a type of grief that lacks clear closure or recognition. Unlike the death of a loved one, ambiguous loss stems from the

absence of something we hoped for or envisioned. In this context, the ambiguous losses many farm and ranch owners feel are often unspoken but profound: the grief of watching a dream, sometimes generations in the making, begin to fade.

If you’re experiencing this kind of grief, please know that you’re not alone, and your feelings are completely valid. Common feelings may be disappointment, frustration, or even guilt that your children or grandchildren have chosen a different path, despite your efforts to prepare them for taking over your operation. These emotions should be shared and discussed with family members. The intimate feelings deserve to be acknowledged and addressed before you move forward with any formal planning.

Many of us elect to dive into logistics and paperwork of farm and ranch succession, but taking time to process the emotional side of this transition is essential in addressing the loss and grief. Here are a few approaches that may help you cope with the grief

and gain clarity as you chart your path forward:

**Think Outside the Box**

Your legacy doesn’t have to end with your family. Step beyond tradition and consider creative succession plans—like mentoring a trusted employee, working with a neighboring producer, or partnering with a conservation group. Legacy is about values, not just lineage.

**Talk Honestly as a Family**

Have open and honest discussions with your family. Understanding each other’s feelings, values, and decisions can help ease emotional strain and pave the way for constructive planning.

**Seek Outside Perspectives**

Don’t be afraid to look beyond your immediate circle. Agricultural consultants, extension educators, and estate planners can offer objective advice and resources tailored to your situation.

**Listen With Respect**

Each family member will process this differ-



REAL AG STOCK

When facing farm succession without a family heir, farm and ranch owners are left to navigate both practical decisions and the quiet grief of an uncertain legacy. Exploring the emotional side of succession can be the first step toward finding clarity and a new path forward.

ently. Be willing to hear what others have to say and acknowledge differing views and emotions.

**Take a Break When Needed**

Sometimes stepping away from the issue, whether it’s for a week-end or a season, can provide clarity and emotional reset.

**Understand the Impact of Change**

Accept that transitioning to a non-family successor may involve structural, cultural, and operational shifts. Try to view this as an evolution of your legacy, not an end.

**Share How You Feel**

Whether with your spouse, a counselor, or trusted friend, don’t bottle up your feelings.

Talking them through can reduce stress and reveal insights you hadn’t considered.

While the grief of ambiguous loss can feel overwhelming, it doesn’t have to define the rest of your story. In future articles, we’ll explore the nuts and bolts of transitioning your business to an unrelated party. The legacy you’ve built matters, regardless of who carries it forward. With thoughtful planning and emotional readiness, you can shape a future for your farm or ranch that honors your hard work and vision.

Contact Jessica Groskopf, Extension Educator, Agricultural Economist (Panhandle). Phone: 308.632.1247. Email: jjohnson@unl.edu

## Women on the Range grazing workshop July 22-24

Women in agriculture are invited to attend the 2025 South Dakota State University Extension Women on the Range Grazing Workshop on July 22–24 at Wedge Tent Ranch near Faith.

Designed by women and for women, this immersive, hands-on workshop focuses on grazing management, plant identification, rangeland health and practical strategies for managing livestock on working

landscapes. It is held in collaboration with Principled Land Managers, operated by Pat Guptill, of Quinn, and Bart and Shannon Carmichael, of Faith.

Registration and hotel information will be

released soon on [extension.sdstate.edu/events](https://extension.sdstate.edu/events). A full schedule and details will be shared with registered attendees prior to the event. Women in surrounding states are welcome to attend.

“Workshops like this are critical to increasing the confidence of women in grazing management,” said Krista Ehlert, assistant professor and SDSU Extension Range Specialist. “By building technical knowledge and offering a supportive space to ask questions and get hands-on experience, we’re helping women make more informed, empowered

decisions on their operations.”

Over four days, participants will dig into key grazing principles, learn to evaluate pasture conditions and explore how livestock interact with rangeland ecosystems. The workshop also emphasizes building community and confidence among women who are actively involved in ranch decision-making.

“One of the most powerful parts of this workshop is the space it creates for women to be honest about the struggles they face—whether it’s navigating family dynamics on the ranch or figuring out the

best way to manage grazing,” said Shannon Carmichael. “There’s something really grounding about standing on the range together and realizing you’re not the only one trying to balance all the moving parts.”

Ehlert agreed, noting that the conversations and relationships developed during the workshop are just as valuable as the technical skills being taught.

For more information or to get on the participant list, contact Krista Ehlert, assistant professor and SDSU Extension Range Specialist, at [Krista.Ehlert@sdstate.edu](mailto:Krista.Ehlert@sdstate.edu).

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## Enhance Your Ranch Management with CoCoRaHS Rain Gauges

The CoCoRaHS (Community Collaborative Rain, Hail, and Snow Network) rain gauges are available for those interested in becoming registered observers. CoCoRaHS is a grassroots volunteer network dedicated to collecting and mapping precipitation data across the country.

By participating, you’ll gain precise knowledge of the annual precipitation on your ranch, rather than relying on data from stations 10-30 miles away. This

localized information is invaluable for making informed grassland management decisions, optimizing water usage, and improving overall ranch productivity.

To get your rain gauge, please contact Laura Edwards, the South Dakota State Coordinator, at [laura.edwards@sdstate.edu](mailto:laura.edwards@sdstate.edu).

By becoming a CoCoRaHS observer, you’ll contribute valuable data to a nationwide network while enhancing your understanding of local



A CoCoRaHS rain gauge before a storm.

precipitation patterns, directly benefiting your ranch management practices.