

About Rancher-to-Rancher

March 2014

Central Coast and California ranchers:

Can productivity and profitability be improved, using tools and resources you already have? You are invited to set up a learning site on your ranch.

Our California Rancher-to-Rancher project can help you set up a small, no-risk learning site trial on your ranch, say a few acres or less, where you could concentrate your livestock for a few hours or a day, and give it a substantial recovery period from grazing. Our support could be help in planning the trial to work with your needs, simple monitoring of the soil surface, and an optional soil carbon baseline plot.



Demonstration of small learning site near Hollister, April 2013.

“I appreciate being able to SEE things in front of me. I didn’t understand trampling vs grazing until today.”
“Water quality and retention of water is our biggest challenge. This is accomplishing multiple tasks. The hard part is thinking about it, using a planning tool. A wonderful day.”

Contact us

Please contact us if you are interested. Rancher to Rancher coordinating committee:

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Developing trial areas

Using grazing **management** to produce massive biodiversity increase and regeneration of pastures and native grasslands requires a systematic process. This process is described in different ways but tends to include the following steps, which can and should form a repeated loop:

- Goal or holistic context:
 1. What is needed for you and your ranch to flourish? What do you value?
 2. What must you produce to sustain those values?
 3. What must your future resource base be to sustain what you value? (Description of landscape including biodiversity and function being managed towards.)
- Monitoring/ evidence of current grassland biodiversity and function
- Plan / trials to move the grassland towards goal
- Monitoring of progress
- Feedback and re-planning

Some potential benefits

You may improve grassland health and productivity by using nature to:

- Unleash perennial grasses and perennial forbs, as well as quality annuals
- Keep plant vigor high
- Shift the composition to a buffet of high quality forages
- Leave better soil cover 365 days a year
- Reduce the severity of drought

- Reduce invasive species problems
- Reduce wildfire risk
- Reduce hay costs
- Reduce fertilizer needs
- Reduce stream bank and gully erosion
- Improve livestock health, performance, and stocking rate
- Build topsoil
- Build profit potential
- Benefit more wildlife
- Have more fun and peace of mind

Trial area design

An area to enclose animals enables you to trial different stock densities and recoveries that will suit your ranch.

- Low cost and simple
- Can use current infrastructure or can be fenced off corners of paddock
- Small areas so only tempted to graze as planned
- Secure so as to contain “corral” densities for short periods of time
- Can be done any time of year, depending on your goals
- Usually do not require stock water as animals only present for short periods of time (several hours)
- Easy to monitor

Two new tools

1. Use high density and/or herd effect to effectively trample and fertilize the learning site.
 - **High stock density:** more than 200 cattle per acre, or more than 1,000 sheep/goats per acre. Animal behavior can be calm, or
 - **Herd effect:** must be excited animal behavior where animals are bunched, raising dust, not paying attention to where they place their hooves. Can occur in a field with low stock density if the herd is bunched and is stirred up by stock dogs or people scaring them as if their predators were present. They need to be there long enough to effectively trample the learning site—not breaking thru fence and heading for the back forty.
 - Or a combination of both can be used—whatever effectively tramples and adds fertilizer to the learning site while still controlling the herd.
2. Provide long recovery period after plants are trampled or grazed to keep plants and soils healthy. This may not be easy to do if your learning site is not fenced separately to ensure the stock cannot return. Electric fencing works great if animals are accustomed to respecting it—even in the dry season. You want to graze/trample the learning site only once or twice a year if you want to really test these new ideas against the potential benefits listed above.

Soil carbon baseline plots

In addition to soil surface monitoring, the Rancher to Rancher project also supports monitoring of soil carbon beginning with a baseline plot, for those interested in monitoring changes in soil organic matter. This is not a carbon credit scheme, but is also feedback to management, and a search for what's possible. More information can be found at soilcarboncoalition.org/challenge