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A guide to evaluate and diagnose range management programs in extensive cattle ranches

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Introduction

Commonly, range managers and ranchers apply range management principles and practices without a guide, conventional protocol, or a reference frame. This happens because knowledge in education and even in extension or consultant programs is obtained over time in a diversity of ways and, in turn, transmitted or applied in a diversity of methods, according to the experience, academic degree, or organization sense of the rancher himself, or his technician. Existing range management knowledge should be organized and applied in a systematic and conventional way. Medical science provides a good example of systematic management. Patients are "inventoried", evaluated, diagnosed and treated in this sequence. Their health status is evaluated and classified. Treatment is established to attain objectives and goals. Therapeutic actions are placed on a daily based calendar to attain the referred objectives and goals in a time horizon. The same manner, range management knowledge should be "packaged" in a range management program, as well as the remainder 7 proposed programs (administration, reproduction, health, nutrition, infrastructure, wildlife, and intensive forage production) to inventory, evaluate, diagnose or even to certify all ranch operation plan (Vásquez *et al*. 2006). According to this idea, a guide based on 50 indicators is proposed to inventory, evaluate, diagnose and classify a specific range management program. The "Los Ángeles" cattle ranch, in northern México, is the reference ranch.

Methods

This is a methodological research paper. With 38 years of experience as a college professor in range and ranch management of the main author, a number of ranchers, range experts, as well as several range management books, journals, articles including a range management program, and other bibliographic sources were considered to build the structure and determine a number of key indicators to integrate the guide. A real ranch (Los Ángeles Experimental Cattle ranch) was used to test the guide. Every indicator is conducted as a question. A value in points (0-5) is assigned to every response, according to its relative importance. The sum of points may lie in a range of 0-125 points. Five categories were established (very poor, poor, regular, good and excellent), depending on the number of points accumulated in five classes determined (0-25,26-50,51-75,76-100,101-125) at the end of the guide.

Results

The initial range management "program" started at Los Ángeles ranch in September, 2011, accumulated a total of 17 points, out of 125 (Pérez 2012; see Table 1). It was classified as a "very poor" program. According to the indicators of the guide, it was determined, in a systematic way, which actions, out of 50, have formed part of the program and what ones still need to be done, in order to attain objectives and goals of a complete (125 points) and conventional range management program. This, in interaction with the remaining 7 programs, would integrate the 1000 points ranch´s operation plan.

Conclusions

As the ranch is a complex and dynamic system, the huge amount of required knowledge on range management and sciences related to the other remaining programs, has to be integrated in a simple, conventionally accepted but systematic way. Ranch operation plans integrated by eight programs, including a range management program, may contribute to achieving this. This could, probably, be a contribution to make range management more consistently a science, than an art. The approximately one million of

Table 1. Example of the 50 indicators to guide, to evaluate and classify range management programs.

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	Indicator (Question)	Yes	No
1	Are you following a range management program?	5	0
2	Have you established objectives?	3	0
3	Have you established goals to attain objectives?	3	0
4	Have you established 50 actions to attain goals and objectives?	4	0

ranches in México may justify a change in methods to integrate and apply range management knowledge. Specialists could communicate and work more efficiently, cover a larger number of ranches, make the planning or ranch classifying job in a regionalized and holistic way. Also, the range management teaching process could be modified to follow a real scenario of where to establish actions tightly linked in reference to what, when, how, where and who has to do actions, if objectives and goals are to be attained.

References

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