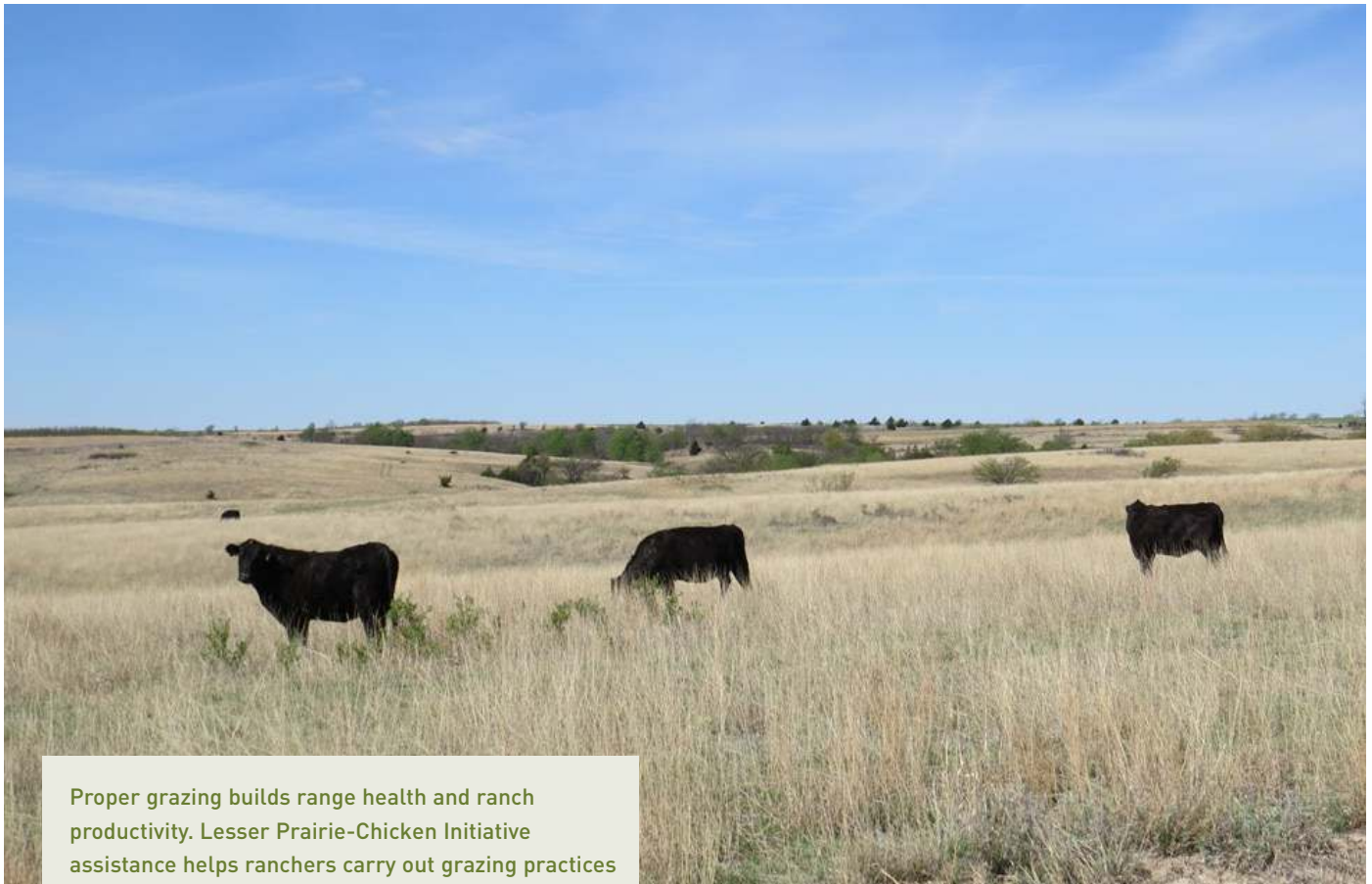


Conservation Strategies Series

Prescribed Grazing



Proper grazing builds range health and ranch productivity. Lesser Prairie-Chicken Initiative assistance helps ranchers carry out grazing practices that benefit both wildlife and ranch operations.

Healthy range is productive, drought-resilient, wildlife-friendly range. Sustainable grazing practices keep grasslands healthy and build the long-term economic health of ranch operations. The Lesser Prairie-Chicken Initiative (LPCI), led by the Natural Resources Conservation Service, offers technical and financial assistance to develop a custom grazing plan and assist with conservation practices that make the vision of healthy rangelands a reality.

Good grazing takes careful planning. At a rancher's request, LPCI range management specialists assess range conditions and ranch infrastructure to craft a conservation plan. Every grazing plan identifies conservation practices tailored to the needs and goals of the ranch operation, including such practices as water development, brush management, prescribed fire, rest rotation, deferment, and seeding. LPCI financial assistance helps ranchers carry out those practices.



Benefits of Prescribed Grazing

- Drought resilience
- Improved grass & forb species mix
- More and better quality forage
- Decreased soil erosion
- Healthy habitat for wildlife

Good planning develops contingencies for changing conditions, like drought. Every LPCI grazing plan includes a drought contingency plan that lays out a clear course of action to minimize long-term damage to the range.

That's good for the ranch's bottom line, and it's good for prairie wildlife.

Prescribed Grazing, Step by Step

- 1. Contact NRCS.** Talk one-on-one with NRCS range conservationists to learn about options for getting involved in prescribed grazing. All NRCS assistance programs are voluntary and all conversations are confidential.
- 2. Planning.** Our first step with landowners who take part in LPCI assistance programs is to evaluate existing conditions and develop a conservation plan.
- 3. Recommend Grazing Utilization.** By carefully assessing forage production, the conservation plan identifies sustainable grazing utilization, which can spell the difference between robust range and range that's over-utilized and damaged.
- 4. Plan for Drought.** Quick, specific, science-based planning for the inevitable droughts of the southern Great Plains helps avoid long-term damage to the range.
- 5. Custom conservation practices.** Water development to distribute grazing, brush management to remove encroaching woody plants, prescribed fire to restore range health, rest rotation and deferment—these are just a few of the conservation practices LPCI helps support.
- 6. Monitoring.** How do we know if the conservation plan is having its intended effect and is doing well by the land and by the landowner? By monitoring range production and utilization.



A Texas horned lizard looks on as rancher Martin Moore (right) and NRCS district conservationist Paul Clark observe a small grazing enclosure, a tool for monitoring forage utilization. Photo credit: Jeremy Roberts, Conservation Media

Rancher Spotlight:

Russell Blew, Kansas

"We implemented an EQIP contract on this ranch that included brush management and prescribed grazing," says Kansas rancher Russell Blew. "By clipping that grass and seeing what species we have out there, seeing what condition the range is actually in, we can put a finer point on our stocking rate. Some people figure 10 acres per cow-calf pair, some people say 8. When you start talking about a herd size of 100 to 200 cow-calf pairs and maybe even more than that, you really need to know how much grass is in a particular paddock. NRCS's technical support brings some actual science into it."

"Implementing those practices long term, it's incredible to see the benefit of the range. We've seen desirable [plant] species get a lot better and undesirable species subside. We're looking at 50-60 years of abuse in a lot of instances, and so it's going to take more than a few years to get it fixed back up."

"[NRCS's] initial role is to help a guy get started and show him that by stocking the range properly, by rotationally grazing it and cutting some trees, he'd see how much better the range is, and then he'd implement those practices, maybe not just for the duration of the contract, but for the duration of the operation of the land."

