

Respect for the Range



PHOTO COURTESY LYLE PERMAN FAMILY

Grassland management has been key on this South Dakota commercial Angus operation.

Story by
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After graduating from South Dakota State University (SDSU) with a general ag degree in the mid-1970s, Lyle Perman returned to his family's ranch near Lowry, S.D., in the north central part of the state. But he soon realized he still had a lot to learn.

Perman tells, "As I tried to make decisions on how many cattle to put in a pasture and how long to leave them there, I recognized there was a science to it, and I wished I would've taken more range classes in college."

That realization set him on a path of lifelong learning about range and pasture management. He and his wife, Garnet, established Rock Hills Ranch in 1976. They raised their two children there, and through perseverance and a focus on grazing management, today, the operation has grown to include more than 300 commercial Angus cows, tillable ground, and fee hunting for

pheasants and deer — as well as the opportunity for their son Luke and his wife, Naomi, to be partners in the business.

Gaining knowledge

Lyle says much of his own introduction to range management came through his children's involvement in the 4-H conservation and range science project areas and their participation in the state's annual summer Rangeland Days for 4-H and FFA youth.

"Learning to identify certain grass species has been very beneficial to managing our pastures," he says.

Additionally, as the Permans learned about grazing and rotational management they began to add water developments and cross-fencing to their operation. That was 25 years ago; today, Lyle says, "Those have been important land practices to our operation."

More recently, in his quest for continual learning, Lyle has gotten involved with the South Dakota Grassland Coalition (SDGC) and is

serving his second three-year term on its board of directors. He sees his involvement in SDGC not only as an opportunity to gain new insight for his operation, but also to share the importance of grassland management with others.

"I think what's really important as a coalition is to establish in people's minds the importance of grasslands. That includes making the general public aware of the value of grasslands, as well as teaching landowners how to better manage grasslands. There's a tremendous amount of information out there, and it's our job as a coalition to get that to producers," Lyle says.

He cites the grazing school at Oacoma, S.D., each September and the bird tour hosted at ranches around the state each June as two examples of SDGC's efforts to bring grassland information to producers and the public.

The next generation

Perhaps the biggest testament to his devotion to conservation and

grassland management is his aim to pass on his knowledge to the next generation.

"My goal on any piece of property we acquire, by lease or by purchase, is to pass it on to the next generation in better condition than we got it in, and along with that to also transfer the knowledge of how the land has been managed and improved," Lyle says.

Today, with son Luke coming back to the operation, Lyle has the opportunity to do just that.

"When I graduated from college, my dad gave me the opportunity to come back, and I wanted to do the same for my son," Lyle says.

As a recent SDSU graduate with a degree in range science, Luke brings ample new ideas to the operation. Lyle and Garnet operate their own herd, while Luke and Naomi are building up their cow herd with 50 owned pairs and 100 cows on shares.

As this process of bringing the next generation into the family ranch occurs, regular family meetings among the two couples are conducted so knowledge can be shared and

Above: Perhaps the biggest testament to Lyle Perman's devotion to conservation and grassland management is his aim to pass on his knowledge to the next generation. Pictured here are (from left) Naomi and Luke Perman and Garnet and Lyle Perman.

decisions can be made together.

“He’ll challenge my decision process, and I’ll do the same to him, but we get along well,” Lyle says. “We are good for each other.”



Also important at Rock Hills Ranch

While grazing management is a cornerstone in the success of the Perman family’s Rock Hills Ranch, innovative thinking and recognizing opportunities have also been key to their viability. Here are some examples:

When it comes to marketing, Lyle Perman explains that they are not tied to a traditional plan. “No two years are the same when it comes to marketing our feeder steers or replacement heifers. Part of our marketing plan is to not sell all of our calves at the same time; we try to sell load lots at different times throughout the year.” For instance, they may sell some steer calves off the cow, while they wean and background the remainder, another year they may retain ownership on a group. Likewise, replacement heifers may be sold or kept and later sold as bred heifers.

“Our goal is to make money,” Lyle explains. To do that, they watch the market and adapt.

The Permans are in their second year of documenting age and source verification of their calves through IMI Global.

“We see that as an important tool for farmers and ranchers, otherwise we feel you are leaving money on the table,” Lyle says.

Lyle advocates utilizing the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NCRS) for the technical information and assistance they provide. He says, “NRCS is often sought for their cost-share funding, but they are a great resource for management information.”

The Permans are also believers in diversification. They’ve added fee hunting for an extra revenue stream. Lyle says, “I look at wildlife as a bonus. I like to think the wildlife are on our ranch because of the habitat we provide and they bring enjoyment and a marketable resource.”

Their hunting enterprise has also created another opportunity — for Luke to direct market beef to some of their hunters.



National Junior Angus Association

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