

# impact

University of Idaho Extension programs that are making a difference in Idaho.

## Management-intensive grazing helps producers improve profits and decrease risk

### AT A GLANCE

The Lost Rivers Grazing Academy (LRGA) combines field and classroom activities in a four-day workshop focused on management-intensive grazing techniques.

### The Situation

Returns for livestock and forage production have been declining over the past five years. Idaho cattle producers have increased production by 16 percent over the past five years, yet gross income from cattle has declined by more than 18 percent. Milk producers have struggled to make ends meet, increasing farm production over the past five years by 14 percent, yet the value of this increased production is just 74 percent of the 2014 production.

Idaho is ranked number one in alfalfa production, number four in dairy cattle numbers and number 11 in beef cattle numbers. Idaho is third in the nation for milk production, and seventh in the nation for sheep production. Livestock and forage production are very important to the economy of Idaho, and the livelihood of its farmers and ranchers.

### Our Response

The Lost Rivers Grazing Academy (LRGA) is a four-day, hands-on workshop designed to teach grazing management skills that will improve pastures and production while reducing risk, allowing producers to be more consistently profitable in an uncertain world. The LRGA was started in the mid-1990's in response to



Instructor Jim Gerrish (second from left) leads participants in a pasture evaluation field exercise at the LRGA workshop.

the environmental, social and economic challenges of high-altitude conventional farming in central Idaho. A team of Extension educators and specialists led by C. Cheyney and aided by Jim Gerrish, currently an internationally recognized grazing consultant, and formerly at the Forage Systems Research Center at the University of Missouri, has grown and changed over the years. The team currently includes K.S. Jensen, C. Cheyney, K. Painter, L. Nunn, G. Shewmaker and S. Williams. Although the LRGA has been presented for over 20 years, the team is still receiving comments like these:

- We're probably feeding a third to a half more cows under our pivot and it's brought in at least a fourth more income.

- This program changed our life.
- This class was hands-on and very discovery based.
- It was an unbelievable amount of excellent and useful information packed into four days of fun!
- It exceeded my expectations.

One of the main draws of the LRGA workshop is the fact that it is held on a working ranch, and participants manage a group of cattle each day as they learn pasture evaluation and management, fencing techniques and livestock management skills. The Eagle Valley Ranch, owned and operated by Nikos Monoyios, has hosted this unique workshop since 2010, allowing UI Extension staff to use their pastures and cattle as a teaching exercise. Each day is packed with learning, including field activities, classroom instruction and evening games with an educational bent.

## Program Outcomes

Highlights from the 2019 LRGA evaluation show large increases in knowledge levels. Participants also felt they were highly likely to make specific changes to their operations. The overall program was rated as either superior (59 percent) or excellent (41 percent) in terms of relevance to their operation.

Participants were asked to compare knowledge before and after the four-day workshop on a scale of one to five as follows: one=none, two=a little, three=some, four=a good deal and five=a great deal. Dramatic gains were achieved in most topics, as illustrated in Figure 1.

In response to questions on the topic of knowledge gained, 89 percent of this year’s participants reported that they gained considerable new information on how livestock can be used to enhance forage production, and 84 percent reported considerable new information in terms of planning and implementing management-intensive grazing (MiG).

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Respondents were asked to describe their most limiting factors preventing them from moving to MiG. The most common responses included lack of financial resources, time and knowledge. The LRGA continues to serve as an effective tool for extending knowledge on this topic with this popular UI Extension program.

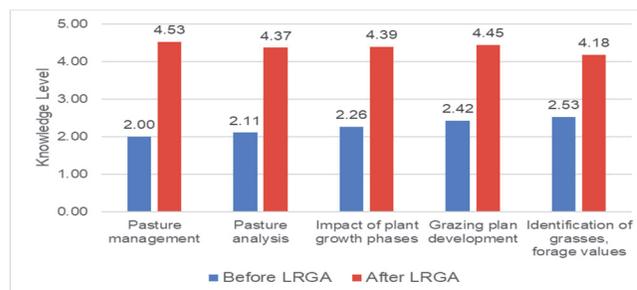


Figure 1. Knowledge gained by participants at the 2019 LRGA showed substantial improvements.

LRGA participants were asked about their current grazing systems as well as the grazing system they would like to be using in two years. Most of the current systems use infrequent moves for pasture management, yet 74 percent report they would like to use systems with daily or every other day moves in two years (Figure 2).

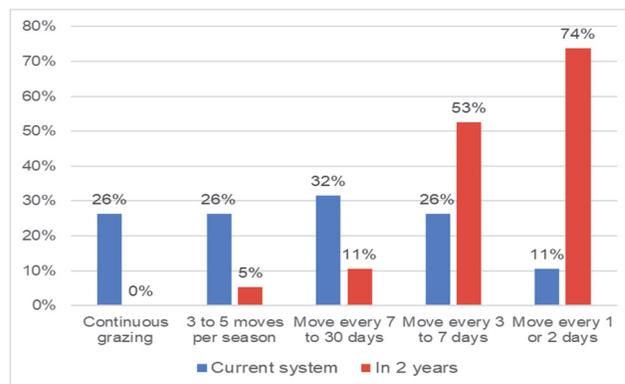


Figure 2. Participants at the 2019 LRGA planned to move toward management-intensive grazing methods in the next two years.