

Ross Mosteller  
District Extension Agent  
Livestock & Natural Resources

## "Economic and Environmental Sustainability for Generations"

The mission statement of Greener Pastures Ranching seems to fit very well with what owner Steve Kenyon shared with participants at the Nebraska Grazing Conference. Really it should be the mission statement for everyone involved in agriculture. Steve gave the warning that he would offend nearly everyone in attendance, as he challenged some very traditional ways of thinking. Everyone should have walked away with his overarching question of “*but what else is it doing?*” in the back of mind when looking at production practices. Here is the quick summary of my notes that seem to have application for anyone, if you step back and look hard at your operation.

“*Are you treating a symptom or a problem?*” Resources are often directed to symptoms of problems rather than taking corrective action to fix the root problem. Kenyon challenged everyone to dig into finding problems, address the problem and symptoms will go away as a result. Some examples were: Spraying weedy forbs in an overgrazed grassland. Weeds are a symptom of an unhealthy rangeland due to mismanaged grazing. Fix grazing management, increase healthy grass stand, fix the weed pressure. Another; soils in nature generally gravitate to neutral pH. Liming acid soils is treatment of a symptom, when the problem is on-going use of synthetic, chemical fertilizers; instead natural nutrient recycling. Keep your focus on problems!

*Who are your employees?* Dung beetles, dragonflies, bats, cowbirds, bacteria, actinomycetes, fungi, protozoa and nematodes. Not the folks you think to employ on a regular basis? Kenyon focuses on all the biological processes of land, air, water and invests in natural “ranch employees”. He presented evidence that more common production practices actually harm these natural employees and creates a situation where treating symptoms becomes normal. One item that especially caught my attention was his firm stand that the grazing animal is an interictal part of natural, nutrient recycling and has to be part of agricultural systems. He noted that in Canada there is a current cost-share program on establishing perimeter fences around crop fields to allow grazing for the benefits it provides to nutrient recycling and healthy soils.

*Grazing Management.* There was much to digest, but the final thoughts to share today revolve around grazing. Here are the Kenyon Grazing Principles: maintain a healthy Water Cycle keeping water in and on your soil, Harvest Sunlight for free through healthy perennial plants, Nutrient Recycling systems are the sustainable way to fertilize, Build Biology from top to bottom within the production system and finally, Establish/Support Polycultures for healthy soil.

So, there you have it! Did I offend you? or at least encourage you to stop and think? This approach to a news column has been a venture into new waters for me and I appreciate the comments and questions received thus far. Most weeks, my goal will be to keep it “between the ditches” of University research-based information, but I always try to keep an open mind to all ideas being tried in the field, and their potential application as well.

Presenters won’t dive into these topics specifically, but we would like to invite folks to join us for more grazing discussion at the 2022 edition of Tailgate Talk, at Matt & Marley Hamon’s 5557 190<sup>th</sup> Road, Valley Falls, 5:30 pm on September 13. Details will soon be available on our Meadowlark website and Facebook page. Plan to bring a lawn chair and learn more about weed suppression when grazing cover crops and forage management prior to dormancy.