Producer Groups: What Are These About, How Do They Work, And Why Can They Be So Successful?

Presenters:
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Agricultural Education in U.S.

- Complex, Integrated Systems
  - Technical
  - Business

- Universities, 2-Year Schools — Age < 25
  - No families, No Decision-Roles, No Schedule F

- Operating Farmers & Ranchers — Adults
  - Can’t leave the farm for 4+ weeks
  - Workshops, Extension, Neighbors, Internet
Course:
“Forage & Grazing Management”

- 7-10 Weeks
- 1x Weekly — 3 Hours, 6–9 pm
- Private Location
- Producer Registration Fees
- Agribusiness Sponsorship
Forage Courses

Producer Study Groups
Oregon

Private, Self-Financed

Producer Study Groups
Grazing Networks

Producer Study Groups

Forage (Study) Groups
• **UVFSG** — 1995 (184)
  Umpqua Valley Forage Study Group

• **FANG** — 2000 (184)
  Forage And Nutrition Group

• **WVGANG** — 2002 (163)
  Willamette Valley Grazing And Nutrition Group

*Total Meetings = 531*
Organization

• **Closed Groups**
• Fees — $150-200/year
• 15-30 Members
• Membership — by Farm (Operation)
• Monthly Meetings
• Rotate — Member Farms or Other Places
• Facilitator — **Hired by the Group**
Membership

• Membership = *Everyone* from the farm

• Types of operations =
  - Beef Cattle
  - Dairy
  - Sheep
  - Goats
  - Horses
  - Hay

• Commercial, Purebred, Larger, Smaller

• Marketing Goals =
  - Standard, Direct, Contracts, Grass-Fed, Organic
Membership

- “Prerequisite” – Courses or Equivalent Background
  Forages, Grazing

- Extension Agents?
  Invited
  Members

- All in the same Room
Typical Meeting

- 3+ hours
- Late Afternoon or Evening
- Pasture Walk
- Focus Topic
- Speaker, Interactive Discussion, Announcements
- Guest — In-Person, Telephone
- Working Meeting — Not a potluck
Typical Meeting

- 6:00 (or 5:00) Pasture Walk
- 7:00 – 7:30
  Indoors – house, barn, etc.
  Focus Topic
  Guest
- (coffee, cookies)
- Announcements
- 9:00 End
Sharing Among Members

- Current Forage/Feed Status
- Labor-Saving Ideas
- Goals — Short-term, Long-term
- Whole-Farm Profitability
Sample Focus Topics

- Reducing Winter Feed Costs: Hay-Balage
- Alternative Legumes, Grasses, Brassicas
  - Plantain, Gala Grazing Brome, Graza Radish, Crabgrass, Persian Clover, Balansa Clover, etc.
- Fertilizer Costs – Efficient Use – Pricing
- True cost of making hay – replacing fertility
- High-Sugar Ryegrasses
- Ultra-high Stocking Densities (>200,000 lb/a)
Some Member Techniques

- MIG
- K-Line Irrigation
- Stocking Density
- T-SUM 200
- Soil Moisture Meters
- Soil Tests, Pastures
- Compost for Pastures

- Hybrid Forage Brassicas
- Grazing Radish
- Plantain, not Chicory
- Gala Grazing Brome
- BMR S-Sudangrass
- Hi-Sugar PRG
Last 3 Meetings:

- **FANG**
  - Library. Guests from California & North Carolina
  - Soil Tests, variability, pH, nutrient interactions, organic matter

- **UVFSG**
  - Sheep-Goat Farm, Pasture Walk, new fields for operation
  - Satellite areas in same enterprise, economics
  - Insurance issues for farms, LRP Lamb Price Insurance

- **WVGANG**
  - Bison farm, pugged pastures, renovations, species, ARG
  - Winter pastures, Winter Feed Alternatives
  - Cover Crops
The Facilitator

- Meeting Leader, Discussion Leader
- Pasture Walks –timekeeper, “stockdog”
- Background Organization
  meeting & financial arrangements, guests, hosting sites, group records, announcements
- Monitors Members
- Technical Expertise, Trust, Advice
The Facilitator

- Enthusiastic, Upbeat
- Confidentiality
- Each meeting – Must be Valuable to All
- Works for the Group –
  “Service”
  “Primary Responsibility”
Forage Study Group – Admin

- Rancher
- Rancher
- Rancher
- Rancher
- Rancher

Dues

Treasurer – Bank Account

Invoice & Payment

Facilitator

Service
Value to Members?

- Information — Forages, Grazing, Nutrition …
- Interactions — Directional Flow of Info Extension, Traditional Flow, Non-Linear
- Support — Ideas, Mistakes — Upbeat
- Confidential

“What’s said in the shed, stays in the shed”
Value to Members?

- Cooperative ventures
- On-Farm Research & Demos
- Venue for Opportunities – guests, combined mtgs, OFGC, etc
- Closed, Advanced Group
  Pride, Professionalism
Value to Members?

- **Fees – Value**
  
  Success?
  
  $ every 6 months

- **Self-Supporting – Sustainable**
How To Begin?

Common Shared Experience

Forage Courses

Tours, Projects, Committees, etc.

Producer Study Groups
Keys for Success – Summary

- **Facilitator**
  - Identify
  - Train

- **Group Membership**
  - Closed
  - Paid

- **Regular Meetings**

- **Starting a Group**
  - Common Experience
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3 FOR $1.00
$1.49 EACH
Questions?

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Producer groups
- sheepSD – supported by ASI
- SD Post Weaning Lamb Performance Program
- Western SD Soil Health Council

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