



UW Cooperative Extension Service Profitable & Sustainable Agricultural Systems Risk Management Agency

## Reduce your unit cost of production by 'windrow grazing'

By Calvin Strom and Kellie Chichester

Two operations in central southern Wyoming are windrowing portions of their meadows to offset rising fuel costs. Hay was swathed starting in mid-July, and then two to four windrows were raked together. The hay was left in the fields to dry and settle.

The windrows will be used for winter feeding by distributing grazing across pastures by using portable electric fences to control consumption. Sectioning off eight acres will provide enough feed for 300 head for approximately three days (based on 1.5 tons per acre yield) while reducing trampling and waste. Fences are moved when the cows have cleaned up what was provided.

Fences should be placed so that after each move the cows have access to the same water source throughout the process, greatly reducing the labor required to move the fences. If supplies allow, fences can be set up ahead of moving cattle to the next section to decrease the time involved of each move.

This year, the Flying Y Cattle Co. near Laramie received 6 inches of rain on its windrows in July and August. As of October 1, the hay was still green underneath and had that pleasant hay aroma; there was a significant amount of regrowth under the windrows. This regrowth below and through the windrows serves as extra feed, and it also helps to keep the windrows in place on the ground

during high wind. The meadow that was windrowed and strip fed last winter had no fertilizer applied this spring. There is an even distribution of cattle across pastures and therefore an even distribution of manure, which performs as a fertilizer. The protein of this year's windrowed hay was 7.5 percent while the baled hay was 6.5 percent. This presents the possibility of eliminating fossil fuel fertilizer use, which will lead to a further reduction in cow cost.

Sims Cattle Co. of McFadden had a group of 310 cows on windrows for 85 days this past winter of 2006-07. The cost per day on windrows is 67 cents per head, while the fed hay cost per day is 86 cents. That is a 23-percent reduction in feed costs per head. See table.

According to research from North Dakota State University, feed costs are 63 percent of yearly cow costs. If your cow cost is \$500 per year, you could realize a 22-percent reduction in annual cow costs by windrow grazing in an 85- to 90-day feeding period. The table shows the profit per acre.

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HAYING METHODS COMPARISONS 9/17/07

COST ITEM	WINDROW	GRAZE	STACK LOOSE	WINDROW
	NO FERT 1T/AC	1T/AC	FERT1.84T/AC	FERT1.84T/AC
LEASE	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00
FERTILIZER	0.00	0.00	45.00	45.00
DRAGGING	1.50	1.50	1.50	1.50
IRRIGATING	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00
MOWING	12.00	0.00	12.00	12.00
RAKING	5.58	0.00	8.50	5.58
SWEEPING	0.00	0.00	5.83	0.00
STACKING	0.00	0.00	10.00	0.00
FENCING & CRIBS	0.00	0.00	2.17	0.00
FIXED EXPENSES	16.00	16.00	16.00	16.00
FEEDING	1.50	1.50	16.00	1.50
TOTAL COST/ACRE	45.58	28.00	126.00	90.58
COST/TON	45.58	28.00	68.48	49.23
PROTEIN	7.00	5.00	8.00	7.00
COST OF SUPPLEMENT	0.12	0.12	0.12	0.12
COST/HD/D @ 25#/HD	0.67	0.67	0.86	0.71
COST/TON=PROTEIN	53.36	53.44	68.48	56.86
PROFIT/ACRE \$95/T	41.64	41.56	26.52	38.14

Selling price of hay = \$95.00

Figures provided by Scott Sims of Sims Cattle Co.

## Managing agricultural human resource risk: Using Ag Help Wanted

By James Sedman and John Hewlett

Anyone involved in production agriculture knows managing risk is a major part of maintaining and growing a successful business.

Production and price risk can be managed with crop insurance, planning, and other programs. Managing the risk associated with human resources in production agriculture is also important. Finding, training, and retaining good employees can be just as important to profitability as managing other sources of risk. In Wyoming, where labor is scarce and competition from other industries is high for qualified employees, the challenge of managing labor risk is significant. This source of risk can become a significant asset when good employees are hired and are valued for their contributions.

A tool is available to assist agricultural producers learn more about managing this source of risk – *Ag Help Wanted: Guidelines for Managing Agricultural Labor*. The book is published by the Western Farm Management Extension Commit-

tee and the Western Center for Risk Management Education. This article focuses on the first three chapters of the book, which discuss the roles of the employer, organizational planning, and staffing the farm and ranch business.

### Roles and Responsibilities as an Employer

Chapter one covers how important it is for an employer to realize employees are the operation's most significant asset. Successful agricultural operations succeed because of their employees, not in spite of them. If a manager treats employees as an expense item, the result will most likely be the least amount of productivity for the cost (i.e. you get what you pay for). When looking at the need for employees, management should first lay out the goals of the business and then determine how employees can best help the operation achieve these goals.

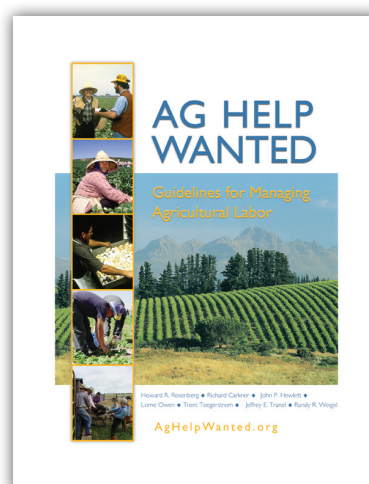
The four main duties of an employee manager include planning, organizing, staffing, and leading. Staffing and leading may

be the most important and most difficult, because being able to take the lead with employees requires knowledge in the job area. This includes practical training, knowledge of external factors, and establishing a good working relationship with employees. Most employees will tell you good personnel skills matter much more than technical knowledge.

### Organizational Planning and Staffing

Chapters two and three delve into the complex tasks of organizational planning and staffing. Whether discussing a small family farm or a large agribusiness with multiple employees, having a sound plan, setting goals, and establishing objectives is important.

Managers or owners should first outline their vision. This should include operation size (i.e. number of head of livestock or acres), financial expectations and needs, and potential employment needs. Goals for growth of the business should be discussed. It is important that goals



shortages, and hiring less than the best employee. Properly orienting new employees quickly and effectively is also an important step discussed.

### For More Information

To access *Ag Help Wanted* online, visit <http://aghelpwanted.org>. Here, managers can learn more about approaches to examining and planning their labor needs. *Ag Help Wanted* is also available in hardcopy for \$25 or on CD for \$10 per copy. E-mail [information@aghelpwanted.org](mailto:information@aghelpwanted.org) for more information.

For more information on human resource risk or other risk management topics on the Web, visit the Western Risk Management Library online at <http://agecon.uwyo.edu/riskmgt>.

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involving employees be specific and attainable (such as increasing work output 5 percent for an employee pay bonus of 10 percent). Goals should be targets for success. Staffing of the business should coincide with these goals.

*Ag Help Wanted* deals with the complex issues related to staffing, including steps in the hiring process such as applications, resumes, interviews, and dealing with workforce