



# SISKIYOU STOCKMAN

*What's New in the "Top of the State". A report for Siskiyou Livestock Producers put out by the Farm Advisors Office, Cooperative Extension of the University of California, located at 1655 South Main Street, Yreka, California 96097*

June 2013

## Thirty-five years of cooperation: A two way street



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### Calendar

August	Annual Cattle Tour Scott Valley Details to follow
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In January 1979 I inherited publication of the then 20 year old newsletter "Siskiyou Stockman". Even at that time it seemed like a long established publication. Thirty-five years later I write the last in its current incarnation due to my pending retirement. As I re-read that January 1979 issue it reviews the highlights of accomplishments from 1959 to 1979: stilbesterol, trace minerals, disease problems and increased yields and varieties. History will be a better judgment of accomplishments from 1979 to 2013 but some of the significant activities have been: computers, increased regulations and attempts to garner local input and influence on those regulations, value-based marketing, globalization and DNA. Heady times for a farm advisor, challenging and changing times for producers. In a sentence the past 35 years have been a time period marked by previously isolated commodity producers becoming linked to global consumers and non-consumers, in the vernacular from "farm-to-fork".

In the broadest sense the change to "value-based" production arches across most of the topics and issues. Beef Quality Assurance, niche markets, EPDs and specialized selection, carbon footprint, water quality impacts, animal welfare and endangered species (to name a few) are all directly or tangentially related to perceived value or "costs" in the

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production of beef as food for humans. In other words these and other topics all change beef from a commodity to a value-based product. Many of these issues are the result of affluence. With a full belly it is much easier to scrutinize and dissect food production. We can be thankful that many have a full belly and more people are obtaining adequate nutrition, although nutritional well-being and food security are far from universal.

Current and future constraints on production appear to arise from several directions. The “full belly syndrome” and affluence does promote or at least allow increased restrictions on food production. Increasing population not only requires more food, but simultaneously results in fewer resources, such as land and water, available for food production. These extensions of current trends are a type of value-based production and are likely to increase over time; more of the same for producers. And, it should be noted that restrictions on food production in the U.S. may not appear to hinder food supply due to imports of food. Production resources are merely out of sight.

A local producer once told me he would raise pink cattle if someone would pay for them. In academic jargon there is no market for pink cattle; if there was I could work on developing them. But there are markets for all kinds of ranch, production and food attributes. Many producers welcome markets for things like pre-conditioning: getting paid for things they already do to a large extent. But many ranchers are less comfortable with other different ranch attributes such as carbon credits or sightseeing. Maybe new partnerships could help forge new markets and new sources of income?

I came in on the heels of California Proposition 13, Prop 13 – property tax limitation, the original TEA party movement to attempt to wrestle taxation under control. It was the first of several and repeated attempts to control government over the past three plus decades. We can see how successful it and many other attempts were based on whether government has grown or shrunk. But not all aspects of government have grown. There are far fewer farm advisors and Extension people now than 35 years ago. And, for a variety of reasons, primarily financial in my opinion, their role has had to evolve. The result for producers is that advisors are further away from them and more influenced by projects that

receive funding from outside sources (sources outside of UC, state or county). Some producers have said this is not a big problem because they can get information from the internet, using their handheld device right in the field. One problem is that much of that information originates from Extension. Will it continue to be fundable information; will it continue to be developed? Secondly, how does that information apply or work under “your” conditions and “real world” conditions. It doesn’t take long to think about all the details that don’t work in your specific situation. Examples being disks or harrows that while fine equipment get eaten up by rocks. Producers are knowledgeable about many topics but what about the ones less familiar like DNA tests, or a new vaccine, or a new product for AI of livestock? At times internet-based information can be a false sense of knowledge. Can a web-page of information really interpret all the nuances of ranching? Can all of the subtle evaluations of a trained person integrating experiences and knowledge really be duplicated in a web-page?

In wrapping up this last issue of the Siskiyou Stockman it is difficult to not attempt to provide some ideas for coping with the challenges. Besides evaluating market options the two biggest and best possibilities to develop further are 1) grazing management and 2) improved breeding decisions. Feed costs and availability continue to be major cost and limiting factors. We have seen all types of new grazing management ideas and schemes. They revolve around better control of plant harvest. We demonstrated years ago about a 50% increase in carrying capacity through more controlled plant harvest by intensively rotating cattle. My perception is many producers recognized the idea and accepted the increase but were not yet ready to implement the practices. There was still relatively inexpensive forage available. That situation no longer exists and different grazing management could provide additional carrying capacity from the same resources. Intensive grazing management can be abused. It is easy in theory yet difficult in practice. Understanding the theory will allow sufficient flexibility for implementation to a far larger extent than what is currently being used. This will increase the carrying capacity of limited grazing lands.

Increased use of forage systems is another alternative. Forage systems are using different plant

materials at different times of the year on different properties. Different feed sources satisfy the grazing needs of livestock while reducing feeding of preserved forages. Due primarily to soil type and water availability, each property has its best forage use and how it fits into the year-long feed requirements. Forage systems can be more difficult to implement than grazing management because they are more comprehensive in the knowledge requirements (which includes plants, water, soils, climate, animal needs, and location).

Improved breeding decisions mean understanding the difference between selection and strategic breeding. Most producers understand and use selection. They attempt to breed the best possible by making selections of bulls and cows. They are selecting what they perceive as the best for their situation. That however is only using half of the toolbox. It is just as easy to include strategic breeding along with selection for the commercial producer. Strategic breeding might include using a terminal sire that helps a maternal-trait cow herd produce progeny best suited for your specific market. (Terminal meaning all of the calves go to market.) The terminal sire excels in traits for the terminal market, improving

cow traits, which focus on living in a harsh environment but raising a calf every year. Calves would be worth more just by using a different bull. Typically a terminal sire might be used only on adult cows to avoid dystocia. Older cows are usually separate from heifers so there is no additional labor cost. Heifers could be bred by AI using high accuracy semen for calving ease and maternal traits. Clearly there are physical constraints to strategic breeding but financially it is too valuable not to employ, (especially when there are few other alternatives to generate additional income).

There are a great many pieces that formed a 35 year cooperative team of producers and me. Individuals at the local, state, University and Federal level were teammates. At times even a pinch hit by a small player had a large impact on the results. But a good team is more than the sum of the individuals (hybrid vigor?!) and requires trust: a two way trait. The clichés apply; challenges abound, things are always changing while they stay the same. Opportunity knocks; disappointment slams the door. I have confidence in my teammates as they have become more world-aware, more knowledgeable and more experienced and can handle the future.

This is your copy of the Siskiyou Stockman, which you requested, or which we thought would be of interest to you.

Sincerely,



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