

Two dozen presenters from five states will share their expertise on topics related to grazing animals and stewardship of grazing lands at the 12th annual Nebraska Grazing Conference at the Kearney Holiday Inn Aug. 14-15.

The goal of the conference is to help producers make better decisions in managing their grasslands, said Bruce Anderson, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension forage specialist.

With the dry weather this year, a big challenge for producers is proper drought management. Drought decreases plant growth, Anderson said, so this means less food in the pastures, which stresses the animals. Faced with inadequate food supply, animals may start eating poisonous plants such as hemlock or Riddell's groundsel that they usually avoid, he said.

Furthermore, limited food sources for animals may lead to them overgrazing pastures and weakening grazing lands potential in subsequent years, Anderson said. "The effects of the drought can be very lasting if we don't deal with the condition while it is here," he said.

Producers can find out more about managing drought risk in a presentation on Wednesday, Aug. 15.

Several speakers will brief conference participants on step-by-step drought planning, livestock feeding and financial considerations, insurance options and lessons learned in drought planning.

Concluding the program on Wednesday afternoon will be a panel of producers who will discuss how to evaluate which grazing system option is best for your operation.

Another highlight of the conference is how producers can use livestock to control weeds in their grasslands, Anderson said.

On Tuesday, Aug. 14, Kathy Voth, founder of Livestock for Landscapes based in Loveland, Colo., will give an afternoon presentation and conduct an evening session on training cows to eat weeds. "This increases the amount of feed available in the pastures by getting livestock to eat desired plants as well as weeds," Anderson said.

Other events on Tuesday include a presentation by Justin Derner with the USDA-ARS High Plains Grasslands Research Station in Cheyenne, Wyo., who will address managing land for ecosystem services and livestock production. Sandy Smart from South Dakota State University in Brookings will add to that topic with a focus on the role of prescribed burns.

Cost-share programs to deal with federal and state endangered species on ranches will be covered by Mike George, USFWS-Ecological Services. Beau Mathewson from Potter, Neb., will describe some of the management practices that led to his family receiving the Nebraska 2011 Leopold Conservation Award.

Two concurrent sessions also will be held on Tuesday: one addresses winter grazing and the other focuses on how to use monitoring to make land management decisions.

The banquet speaker Tuesday evening will be UNL range scientist Walter Schacht, who will talk about his year teaching and conducting research on rangelands in Namibia.

Registration is \$80 if postmarked by Aug. 1 and \$95 afterward. One-day registrations are also available, and walk-ins are welcome. Reduced registration fees are offered for full-time high school or college students. Registration fees will be paid by the UNL College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources for students who will still be in high school this fall and who pre-register by the Aug. 1 deadline.

Hotel reservations can be made by contacting the Holiday Inn at 308-237-5971 and specifying the Nebraska Grazing Conference for appropriate rates, or by booking online (see link at

conference website).

For more information, ask at a local UNL extension office, visit the conference website at <http://nebraskagrazingconference.unl.edu> or contact the UNL Center for Grassland Studies at (402) 472-4101 or grassland@unl.edu.

The conference is sponsored by several public and private organizations including the conference underwriters: Center for Grassland Studies, Farm Credit Services of America, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, and the Nebraska Grazing Lands Coalition.