

Annual Rancher's Workshop has become a tradition

WHITE RIVER - In keeping with a 22-year tradition, the annual Rancher's Workshop will be held Jan. 9, 2001, 9 a.m. - 3:30 p.m. at the Community Events Center, White River.

The first Rancher's Workshop was held in January 1979 in Mission. The Mellette and Todd County Conservation Districts had a challenge: to help the local people improve their natural resources while maintaining their standard of living.

The conservation district boards studied the land use in the two counties and discovered that 80% of the lands were rangeland. From this discovery, the concept of a rancher's workshop to fulfill the needs of local ranchers was born, the brain-child of Derrill Glynn, chairman of the Mellette County Conservation District. Now, more than two decades later, the annual Rancher's Workshop has become a tradition for many people both locally and regionally. It is expected that this year's workshop will attract 120 attendees.

The first Rancher's Workshop was a small gathering of invited key local businessmen and ranchers. Dave Steffen, Natural Resources Conservation Service district conservationist, and Dale Mallory, SDSU County Extension Agent, developed the first agenda. It was so successful that the word began to spread and people started notifying the conservation districts that they wanted to be invited to the next workshop.

As a result, the Rancher's Workshop became an annual

event and began to grow and change. Ranchers' needs, as expressed to the conservation district board members, became the focus of the agendas, and the workshop gained a reputation for providing ranchers with information that would benefit their operation.

The Mellette and Todd County Conservation Districts have been steadfast in maintaining this worthwhile event. They have worked with local ranchers, businessmen, NRCS, SDSU Extension Service, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and now the South Central Resource Conservation and Development Council to insure coverage of a wide array of topics by some of the most knowledgeable speakers. For example, in 1980, Maurice Davis, NRCS Range Conservationist, told of the nutrient value of range plants. In 1984, Barry Dun, Bill Cumbow, Melvin Shelbourn, Ken Kingsbury and Darrel Batie, local ranchers, conducted a panel discussion of how grazing systems work on their places.

Nutritional requirements of the beef cow on the range was the topic of a 1985 presentation by James Butler, DVM, Valentine, NE. In 1988, Jan Rasmussen, a local rancher, led a panel discussion of her daily ranch operations. In 1990, ranchers learned how to better manage their crossbred herd from Terry Goerhing, SDSU Extension beef specialist. In 1991, Barry Dunn, a Todd County rancher, explained the benefits of the

Bootstraps program. This program was started from needs expressed by the Todd County Conservation District board and has now grown to state- and nationwide, and there has even been some international interest.

In the last five years, there has been an concentrated effort to include at least one "hands on" session for producers in the Rancher's Workshop. Animals have been brought in for body condition scoring, bull evaluation, pulling calves, and injection site blemishes. Using actual animals to demonstrate has proven to be a great learning tool.

Since 1998, a trade show with displays and crafts, has become an added feature. This year there will be at least 25 booths from local in-home businesses to Main Street businesses.

The Mellette and Todd County Conservation Districts are proud to have had successful Rancher's Workshops for 22 consecutive years. They are the only Conservation Districts in the state with this record. Workshop success can be directly attributed to the fact that it is developed for the rancher by the rancher.

Anyone with ideas for the Rancher's Workshop is asked to contact any local Conservation District member or Extension board member, and plan to bring a neighbor and attend this year's workshop.

Call the Conservation District or County Extension office for more details on this year's agenda.