

Ranchers' Roundtables Highlight Research, Practical Information

by CALLIE GNATKOWSKI GIBSON

Like livestock, people prefer and perform better in a stress-free environment. A new series of informal educational seminars — Ranchers' Roundtables — developed and hosted by New Mexico State University's (NMSU's) Corona Range and Livestock Research Center (CRLRC) use a casual atmosphere to get information to producers.

The Ranchers' Roundtables, which started in January, were organized by Shad Cox, CRLRC Ranch Superintendent, and Eric Scholljegerdes, NMSU ruminant nutritionist. "In the phone calls we both field, we are able to have good interactions and get good information to producers," Cox said. "We wanted to try to duplicate that in a little larger setting, keeping the personal interaction and giving producers the chance to learn from our college experts, extension personnel, and other industry professionals."

"It's a great chance for participants — both ranchers and panelists — to get to know each other," he continued. "We think we get just as much from talking to the participants as they can get from us. We learn what is on their minds and what some of their concerns and problems are, which can help us direct our programs and research."

Eleven Ranchers' Roundtables are planned for 2012, every month except for June, when the Ranch holds its annual field day and half day of college. Topics so far this year have included herd health and vaccinations, reproduction and heifer development and spring nutrition and poisonous plants. April's program will focus on wildlife habitat and enhancement, and the May program will be on computer and internet programs. "We try to stay ahead of the management calendar by about two months," Cox said.

By bringing in diverse experts and focusing on a variety of topics, Cox hopes to be able to reach a little different audience each month. He says that so far, about one-third of attendees at each Roundtable have been new. "We also hope that some of the roundtable discussions will evolve into more specialized topics, maybe even a weekend class, if there is interest," he said.

At each Roundtable, a panel of three to

five experts presents information to the group, followed by questions and discussion. "We have had great industry support," Cox said. "Our sponsors have been very impressed by the attendance, I don't think they realized how far New Mexico ranchers will travel for information."

"I can't say enough good about the format of the roundtables," said Pete Gnatkowski, Lincoln County Extension Agent. "People feel comfortable participating and asking questions, and it's a very effective learning environment. Shad and Eric deserve a lot of credit for putting these programs together."

The Ranchers' Roundtables are also an opportunity to showcase the CRLRC's new outreach center, the Southwest Center for Rangeland Sustainability, which was completed in August. "We want people to utilize the facility," Cox said. "We have grand plans, and hope to increase activity at the center."

Headquartered just east of Corona, the CRLRC is in a good location to reach the rural residents of central New Mexico. The ranch includes parts of northern Lincoln County and southeastern Torrance County, and is just a few miles from Guadalupe, De Baca and Chaves Counties. Cox and his assistant, Richard Dunlap,

operate the ranch to accommodate numerous ongoing research projects in addition to regular ranch activities.

The CRLRC operates as a working ranch and is expected to support itself economically, which makes it unique among NMSU's research stations, said Gnatkowski, who also serves on the facility's advisory committee. "Shad and Richard work well together, and do a great job balancing the ranch work with the facility's other missions. Both the ranch and new building are very good venues for producer education."

For more information, contact Shad Cox at 575/849-1015, shadcox@nmsu.edu, or visit www.corona.nmsu.edu. You can also join the CRLRC on Facebook at www.facebook.com/NMSUcorona. □



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