

Forage For Thought

The Southwest Grassfed Livestock Alliance (SWGLA)

Winter/Spring '10 Strengthening the Bond Between Good Stewardship and Healthy Food

GRASS-FED IN THE NEWS

So much has happened these past few months to support grass-fed, it's hard to keep up! It is exciting to note that media exposure and consumer awareness of the many benefits continues to rise. In January, millions of Americans read in **TIME Magazine** that "...if fed solely grass, cows could play a key role in reversing climate change", this on the heels of a new report by the United Nations which validated the immense carbon sequestration capacity of properly managed pasturelands. Animal Welfare Approved, on their website, refer to this as "a carbon sink that could be even greater than forests." Soon after, The American Grassfed Association website received over 80,000 hits in an afternoon after grass-fed got a "Shout Out" on **Oprah**, thanks to **Michael Pollan**, best selling author and guest on the Oprah Winfrey Show in a segment called "Food 101". Then the **Edible Institute** ("Edible Santa Fe", "Edible Phoenix", etc...) hosted food writers from all over the country right here in Santa Fe to talk about local food. They even flew in **Will Harris of White Oak Pastures**, who showed us the delightful movie "Cud" about his ranch in Georgia—and explained how he managed to set up his own processing plant, which supplies Whole Foods and adds jobs to a depressed rural economy. Early in February, SWGLA participated in the "Fresh Connections" event at the Santa Fe Farmers Market and hosted by the Santa Fe Alliance, where we discussed grass-fed with a host of restaurateurs. To top it all off, SWGLA presented at the **Society for Range Management** Conference in Denver February
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Less than a day old! Goodloe Ranch: Capitan, NM

SWGLA Hosts Dave Pratt in One-Day "Ranching for Profit" Seminar

By Barbie Goebel
Cimarron Angus Maxwell, NM

Last November the Southwest Grassfed Livestock Alliance (SWGLA) sponsored a seminar in Albuquerque with Ranch Management Consultants (RMC), a company from California, whose focus is helping ranchers put profit in their business. This was a one day class, crammed full (some felt too full) of very useful information. RMC offers the Ranching for Profit school at different locations throughout the US and Canada each year. It is a week long course dealing not only with the financial aspect of the ranching/farming business but also economics, ecology, sustainability, livestock nutrition and even advice on passing the ranch to the next generation. Dave Pratt is the CEO of RMC and he presented this seminar as a condensed version of his school.

Dave began by defining a business and
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El Morro Valley Ranch: Ramah, NM

By Rebecca Allina



El Morro Valley Ranch is located on the high plains of the Zuni Mountains in northwestern New Mexico. The ranch looks out over striped mesas, ancient volcanoes and El Morro National Monument. It is at 7,000 ft elevation. Cattle at the ranch graze on native grasses and are winter-supplemented with organically raised forage crops. This last summer the first range-fed beef went to market from this relatively new endeavor. Charles Mallery is the owner/operator of this ranch, and no stranger to cattle ranching, having raised cattle over 20 years ago for the commodity market. He is ranching once again; something Charlie has wanted to do for a long time. This time it is with increased awareness and concern over the state of food in America. He has always been environmentally oriented and has sought to keep his ranching operation natural and environmentally sound, which brings him to his newest endeavor; raising range-fed organic beef.

Charlie purchased cows in 2008 from an old friend who was leaving the cattle business. Soon after, he made the decision to seek organic certification for his grazing and farming land and also for the cattle that would be born into the herd. The ranch land was certified organic by NMOCC in summer of 2009 and cattle born after May, 2009 are certified organic. None of the meat the he has processed so far is certified organic but it is all raised within organic, grass-fed guidelines.

“This is not easy country to farm,” says Charlie. “So often you hear about how many cows you can graze per acre. Out here it is how many acres you need per cow. One of the things that we are trying to do is to graze carefully, moving the cattle frequently so the fragile grassland is not overgrazed. Operating our ranch as ‘grass farmers’ has required a good deal of time and attention for us. I now realize that this is at least two businesses; one is raising and finishing the cows and the other is marketing and distributing the beef.”

Lack of a nearby processing facility is a challenge. There are only 2 USDA Organic certified slaughter facilities in the area; one near Albuquerque (3 hours away) and one in Durango, CO (4 hours away). We have to truck our cows to those facilities. “It is not what we would like to do for their sake *and* ours,” says Charlie, “We believe that low stress management and processing is an important piece to maintain all the tenderness and other benefits of range feeding and finishing.”

The ranch has looked into use of the Mobile Matanza (a traveling slaughter facility) but since the beef is dry aged for 21 days there is a need for a place to hang and package it. According to Charles, “The question is how to create a viable infrastructure that makes all aspects of the business possible. Our vision is for regional processing centers. We want to eliminate the stress of handling and transporting the cattle to slaughter. The idea of the Mobile Matanza could be part of the solution and a great resource for range and grass-fed producers. Regional processing centers where beef is aged, processed and distributed are needed to complete the regional processing system.

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Mission Statement: *“SWGLA is an alliance of producers, land managers, conservationists and researchers that promotes grass-fed livestock products through applied research, educations and cooperation in order to improve human, ecological, social and animal health.”*

From SWGLA's New President, Nancy Ranney

Ranney Ranch: Corona, NM

Greetings! We welcome an auspicious opening to the decade for grassfed producers, consumers, and supporters here in the Southwest. Already we have received considerable winter moisture throughout much of our region. And in recent weeks, we have seen a raft of supportive publicity on grass-fed beef in the national news which has in short order increased the demand for environmentally-friendly, healthy beef. It is an exciting time in the world of sustainable, local and environmentally sound food production and I am very much looking forward to serving as President of the Southwest Grassfed Livestock Alliance at this moment in its history.

As you will see in this Newsletter, our work and outreach has extended greatly during the past year under the able leadership of President Martin Honegger and Director Laurie Bower. We have pursued our goals of providing information and expertise across the spectrum of grass-fed livestock production to producers, marketers and consumers and have had a strong presence at workshops, conferences and training courses throughout the Southwest.



A heartfelt thanks to Martin Honegger for "taking the reins" as president during a critical time for SWGLA these past few two years!



Now, with increased demand for reliable sources of healthy grass-fed product, we have further challenges. As President, I look forward to guiding SWGLA in the following areas: to provide its producer members with resources and support to fulfill their marketing goals and reduce financial risk; to offer its consumer members clear and scientifically-based guidelines for the selection of healthy, humanely-raised meat products; and to address the single most important obstacle to the delivery of locally produced grass-fed meats to the consumer in the United States today, that of the shortage of small USDA approved processing facilities.

Our work this coming year will focus on these goals. I invite you to be part of our Alliance and this exciting work. As a New Mexico grass-fed beef rancher and land use planner, I am thrilled at the opportunity to be part of a larger community that hails the healthy interaction of people, animals and sustainable land use practices and I look forward to working with all of you who share this commitment.

**In need of a workshop or public event in your area to help promote grass-fed livestock or help ranchers get started providing grass-fed livestock? Give us a call we are here to help you!
SWGLA 505.231.3467 or visit our website at www.grassfedlivestock.org**



MEMBER'S VOICE

A Trip to the Desert Southwest



Renowned grass-fed research scientist, Anibal Pordomingo talks with SWGLA president, Martin Honegger at the USDA Jornada Experimental Range near Las Cruces, NM.

After a six hour drive through half of New Mexico we arrived in Las Cruces the afternoon of October 15th before the SWGLA Workshop. Laurie Bower had organized a tour of the Jornada Experimental Range given by Ed

Fredrickson and Alfredo Gonzales. Not only did they show us the stunning beauty of the desert range and the research station, they also introduced us to the Criollo breed of cattle that are so well adapted to this kind of environment. Thanks for a great and informative tour.

Friday morning started with opening remarks by Laurie and Ed at the NMSU. The next day and a half were filled with very professional presentations covering subjects like forage, ruminant nutrition, stocking rate, breed differences with an emphasis on grassfed livestock. Animal behavior and stress management were covered as well as the advantages of mixed species stocking to reduce predator losses and improve range health.

Anibal Pordomingo's presentation on grass fattening and the special meat cuts in Argentina ensured a healthy appetite for a great steak dinner in old Mesilla on Friday night. (Sorry for the ones that missed it)

On the way home, a bunch of us invited ourselves to visit the Carrizo Valley Ranch where Cheryl and Sid Goodloe graciously put up with us and gave us the grand tour of their place and fed some of the best beef the Southwest has to offer. Thanks a bunch to all of you.

Martin Honegger, Pino Creek Ranch,
www.nmgrassfedbeef.com



The Western Center for
Risk Management Education
Washington State University Extension



11th, during the full-day event: "Sustainable Rangelands Through Low-Input Grassfed Production". Approximately 180 people attended this event, which included speakers such as Meg Cattel of Windsor Dairy, Dale Lasater of Lasater Grassland Beef, Richard Parry of Foxfire Farms, Kit Pharo of Pharo Cattle Co., George Whitten and Julie Sullivan of the San Juan Ranch, Dennis Morrooney of Sky Island/47 Ranch in Baja, AZ, Ed Fredrickson of the USDA-ARS Jornada Experimental Range, Harvey Sprock of USDA-NRCS Colorado, Laurie Bower, Director of SWGLA and Carrie Balkcom, Director of the American Grassfed Association. And if you're kicking yourself that you missed this fabulous event, organizer Dan Nosal of NRCS in CO has assured us that the entire video will be posted on the SRM (www.rangelands.org) and AGA (www.americangrassfed.org) websites soon!

- Laurie Bower, Director



Sid Goodloe (2nd from left) discusses holistic land management with Megan Lerew, Cheryl Goodloe, Martin Honegger and Dr. Dean Anderson during a tour of Carrizo Valley Ranch.

Thank You to Our Supporters: Many thanks to the following organizations for their contributions to SWGLA: **Western Risk Management Education, The New Mexico Department of Agriculture, Farm to Table, The Southwest Marketing Network, The Santa Fe Alliance, The American Grassfed Association, The Quivira Coalition** and our **Private Donors.**

Organic Certification 101

By Joan Quinn, New Mexico Organic Commodities Commission



As more information comes out about CAFO-raised/finished meat, a growing number of consumers are looking for labels that guarantee that their meat was healthily and humanely raised, and processed without preservatives or pathogen-reducing schemes (which are proving to be ineffective at best). Many consumers are looking to certified organic meat and are willing to pay a premium for it at the cash register. *Certified organic+ grass-fed* is viewed by many consumers as the most desirable label available.

Affixing those labels does not mean however, that your meat will find a market with no effort on your part. Issues such as constancy of supply, building customer loyalty to your label, and differentiating from the “natural” label will need to be addressed. Many retail chains actually prefer to feature “natural” beef, which they can purchase at a lower price. Since many consumers still confuse “natural” with organic or grass-fed there is an opportunity for increased profit margin for these retailers who buy the cheap “natural” meat, promote it to customers who don’t understand that “natural” has virtually no meaning, and charge a price that is comparable to organic or grass-fed.

At the same time, movies like *Food, Inc.*, are creating a more educated customer base that will support organic and grass-fed meat. The good news is that for most ranchers the transition from grass-fed practices to organic grass-fed practices is relatively painless. The major requirements for organic certification follow.

You must have an Organic System Plan, which can be created by completely filling out the Application for Organic Certification. This plan must cover methods, materials, monitoring, record keeping and management of your operation.

Mammals producing meat or fiber must be “born organic”-- in other words, the mother must have been under organic management from at least the last third of gestation.

Dairy animals must be under organic management for at least one year before producing organic milk. There is a one-time provision for conversion of whole dairy herds to organic production. Replacement dairy animals should be produced from within the organic herd or purchased from Certified Organic sources. Breeder stock can come from any source but, if pregnant, it must be under organic management by the last trimester if the offspring is to be used for organic slaughter stock.

Poultry, whether for meat or eggs, must be under organic management starting no later than second day post-hatching.

Animals on an organic operation cannot be put under non-organic management for any length of time and still be labeled as organic. Breeder or dairy stock that has not been organic since the last third of gestation may not be sold as organic slaughter stock.

All of the agricultural portion of organic animal feed must be certified organic. Some nonsynthetic and synthetic substances are allowed as feed additives and supplements; this list is extremely limited. Natural minerals are allowed, as are appropriate fish products, and FDA-approved trace minerals and vitamins. Animal



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Organic 101 *(continued)*

and poultry slaughter by-products are not allowed as feed, neither are: feed formulas with urea or manure in them; the use of animal drugs, including hormones, as a means of promoting growth; or the use of feed supplements and additives in quantities greater than that needed for good nutrition.

Animal healthcare should be based on preventive measures first, including: choosing appropriate species and breeds; good feed regimen; good housing; freedom of movement and stress reduction; vaccines and other veterinary biologics.

Specific synthetic parasiticides are allowed under two conditions: breeder stock, when not in the last third of pregnancy or nursing offspring, and dairy stock, with a minimum 90-day withdrawal prior to selling the milk or milk products as organic.

If an animal is sick enough to need non-organic medication, it must be appropriately treated and then removed from the organic herd or flock. Also prohibited are: use of any animal drugs in the absence of illness (except vaccines); use of hormones for growth promotion; use of synthetic parasiticides on a routine basis or with slaughter stock; use of any animal drugs in violation of existing laws and regulations

Animal living conditions must allow the animals to behave normally, and to have access to the outdoors, shade, exercise areas, fresh air and sunlight, and water. Ruminants must have pasture access and derive a major portion of their nutrition from it whether meat or dairy animals. If bedding is provided, and the animals might eat it, it must be certified organic. Under certain conditions and for limited periods of time, animals may be confined.

You must track the identity of all organic animals and their products.

Record keeping should address, at a minimum: ranch/farm maps; an activity log (when you did what where; only major activities need be logged --pasture rotations, feed stocking, breeding, birthing, healthcare events, etc.); documentation of purchases or births/hatchings of animals; organic certificates for purchased feed; animal/herd/flock health records (treatments, medicines, vaccines, etc.); equipment cleaning logs; production records (milk, eggs, meat, fiber; dates and amounts); slaughter/harvest records; sales records (these last two may be combined into one in some cases). Records must be kept for at least five years from date of creation.

If you are interested in pursuing organic certification, or have questions, please get in touch with me and I will be happy to help.

Joanie Quinn
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Multippecies Grazing: Cattle and sheep (far in the background) at Cimarron Angus in Maxwell, NM fatten on red and yellow clover, along with a variety of other forages and grasses.

Dave Pratt *(continued)*

showing us that it should not be just a collection of assets and lots of jobs. He suggested that we need to spend time **working on the business**, not just **working in the business**. We need to pay ourselves a salary and learn to analyze each enterprise we operate so we know if it returns a profit. Then we can clear away the “dead wood” and become more successful. RMC has even developed benchmarks that are based on successful agricultural businesses that we can compare to once we’ve learned how to calculate gross margins and profit. Dave also challenged us with many questions: What is profit for? Should we buy land or rent? Why are most grassfed businesses not profitable? We learned to distinguish between direct costs and overheads and where to allocate them when figuring profits.

The seminar was well attended and SWGLA did a great job organizing the day. For those new to Dave Pratt’s way of teaching, it might have been difficult to grasp enough in this introductory session to put to use by the end of the day. Much of the information provided was general in scope with the idea of challenging us to start thinking “outside the box”. Some who attended were looking for answers to very specific questions regarding their own grassfed business. The RMC people attempt to give you the tools and the mindset to be able to answer these specific questions yourself. This seminar was a great introduction to the concepts of Ranching Management Consultants and a good refresher course for those of us who had already attended their school.

El Morro Valley Ranch (continued)

We are committed to raising organic, range-fed cattle and believe that changes in the way that America eats and produces food are very important. We support the concept of a regional food system and enjoy doing our part in reinvesting carbon into the soil.”

El Morro Valley Ranch offers grass-fed and range-fed USDA Certified beef. They have halves, quarters, and variety boxes. Custom boxes and orders are also available. The ranch will have Certified Organic Range-fed Beef, certified by NMOCC, in the summer of 2010. You may contact the ranch at:



Charles Mallery and Rebecca Allina

elmorrovalleyranch@gmail.com or the ranch headquarters at (505) 783-4521.

What’s Cooking?



From
Barbie Goebel:
Cimarron Angus
Maxwell, NM

Oxtail Ragout 4-5 servings.

- 2 oxtails, skinned and cut into pieces
- 2 T butter
- 2 T olive oil
- 1 cup chopped celery
- 1 T parsley
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 carrot, peeled and chopped
- 1 T flour
- ½ cup beef stock
- ½ cup dry red wine
- 1 ½ T cognac, optional
- 1 cup canned, diced tomatoes
- 1 T lemon juice
- 1/8 tsp. nutmeg
- ¼ cup Marsala or Madeira wine
- Freshly ground pepper to taste

Brown oxtails well in butter and oil in a large skillet. When browned transfer to a crockpot. Add carrot, celery and garlic to skillet and cook until lightly browned. (Add a bit more butter or oil if needed) Sprinkle the carrot and celery pieces in the skillet with the flour and add some stock. Stir to dissolve brown particles and scrape this mixture into the crockpot. Add the remaining stock to the crockpot with the red wine, cognac, tomatoes, parsley and bay leaf. Cook on low for 8 hrs. Add more beef stock if needed.

Remove the oxtail pieces, skim excess fat from sauce. Heat sauce, add lemon juice, nutmeg, Madeira and pepper. Simmer 5 mins. and pour sauce over oxtails.

Rice or mashed potatoes go well with this.

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Join SWGLA Today

New and Renewing members can send their \$25.00 tax deductible membership (or \$50 for producer membership) to: **SWGLA, 1210 Luisa Street, Suite 10 Santa Fe, NM 87505**
For more information, visit **www.grassfedlivestock.org**

You may also send your tax deductible contribution to the above address. ***Funding is needed to support SWGLA's ongoing efforts to increase the availability of healthy, local meat!***
We thank you in advance for supporting SWGLA.

Name (please print) _____ **Ranch Name (if applicable)** _____

Mailing Address _____

City: _____ **State:** _____ **Zip:** _____

Phone: _____ **E-Mail:** _____