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Executive Director's Note

The past couple months have been a wonderful reminder of how much can be accomplished when producers, partners, educators, volunteers, and community members come together around South Dakota's grasslands. Since our last newsletter, we have traveled across the state for workshops, tours, celebrations, and educational events, and we are grateful to everyone who helped make them possible.

This summer's Working Lands Workshops took us to three very different operations.

At the Anderson Ranch near Lemmon, we explored how bale grazing can improve efficiency, reduce feeding costs, and build healthier soils. At the Juelfs Ranch near Prairie City, conversations focused on contract grazing, carrying capacity, and soil health. Participants explored the infrastructure and management required to graze more than 1,100 yearlings.

Our final workshop at the Kirkpatrick Ranch near Midland offered productive conversations around utilizing tame grass fields for grazing instead of hay production as well as using cover crop mixtures for grazing and much more. This Workshop was especially exciting as the Kirkpatrick's were presented with the SD DNR Natural Resources Conservation Award - a BIG CONGRATULATIONS to them on that well-deserved recognition! We even ended with delicious fresh cut steaks, courtesy of the Kirkpatricks.

These workshops are valuable not because every operation should look the same, but because they allow producers to exchange ideas, ask practical questions, and consider what might work on their own land. If you have yet to attend a Working Lands Workshop, keep an eye on our events page next spring!



Photo courtesy of Ben Juelfs

UPCOMING EVENTS

Oct 21, Rapid City, SD
SRM Annual Meeting

Dec 3-4, Box Elder, SD
Grasslands in Action 2026 Annual
Conference & Meeting

Executive Director's Note Continued...

In August, we joined producers, conservation partners, and community members at Darling Creek Ranch for the Leopold Conservation Award Winner Tour. The tour offered an up-close look at the management practices, values, and long-term commitment to stewardship that earned the ranch this recognition. We appreciate the family's willingness to open their operation and share what they have learned along the way. 125 People attended the tour.

August also brought our first Prairie Fest at Good Earth State Park. This new event welcomed over 650 guests comprised of families, ranchers, outdoor enthusiasts, educators, and community members for a day celebrating Dakota grasslands. From early-morning birding, bird banding, and prairie tours to educational speakers, children's activities, live music, local food, and conversations with our many partners, the day offered something for every age and interest. Most importantly, Prairie Fest created a welcoming place for people with many different connections to the prairie to learn from one another and celebrate the landscapes that sustain us. Thank you to the presenters, musicians, food vendors, volunteers, partners, sponsors, and everyone who attended and helped make our first Prairie Fest such a successful and memorable experience.

We recently wrapped up the grazing school in Chamberlain. Over three days, participants worked through grazing planning, plant identification, soil health, livestock management, monitoring, and other topics that influence both the land and the operation. This year's Grazing School provided a unique opportunity to discuss and work through in real time how to adjust to dry conditions and less forage. We are grateful to everyone who shared their knowledge and to those who invested in this learning opportunity.

With our summer events behind us, our attention now turns to Grasslands in Action 2026: Confident Decisions in Uncertain Times, December 3–4 at The Box Events Center in Box Elder, SD. This year's program will bring together practical information about livestock, land, business management, succession planning, and navigating uncertainty. Featured speakers include Ray Marxer, Dr. Tom Noffsinger, Alejandro Carrillo, and agricultural attorney Clint Fischer. We are also prioritizing more time during the event for conversation and networking so attendees can connect with speakers, partners, sponsors, and one another. Registration is now open at sdgrass.org (more details below).

Each of these events reflects the Coalition's commitment to creating practical opportunities for people to learn, connect, and share ideas. None of them would happen without the generosity of our hosts, the expertise of our speakers and partners, the dedication of our volunteers, and the support of our members. Thank you for being part of this work and for helping us continue building productive, resilient grasslands and strong rural communities across South Dakota.

Annual Meeting & Conference

Dec 3-4, Box Elder, SD

The South Dakota Grassland Coalition's Annual Conference brings together ranchers, land managers, ag professionals, and partners from across the region for two days of practical ideas, real-world experiences, and meaningful connections. This year's theme, "Grasslands in Action: Confident Decisions in Uncertain Times," focuses on navigating the challenges and opportunities facing today's operations with greater confidence.

From grazing management and profitability to livestock handling, business planning, leadership, and the people behind the operation, you'll hear from experienced speakers and fellow producers who are putting ideas into action.

Rebuilding America's Cow Herd Starts with Grassroots

by Senator Mike Rounds

Anyone who has spent time around cattle understands one simple truth: no grass means no cattle.

For generations, America's farmers and ranchers have produced the highest-quality beef in the world while caring for the land that makes it all possible. Through droughts, floods, extreme temperatures, volatile markets and countless other challenges, cattle producers have continued doing what they do best: raising cattle and delivering safe, affordable, American-raised beef to families across the country and around the world.



Flash forward to today: the United States is losing an average of 2 million acres of grassland each year. At the same time, the United States cattle herd is at its lowest level since 1951. USDA estimates there are just over 86 million head of cattle and calves nationwide, nearly 30 million fewer than its peak in the mid-1970s. This presents a grave threat to our nation's cattle market, and a real issue for our producers who are working hard to rebuild and move forward in a volatile market.

Every producer knows there isn't a quick fix. Regardless of the market signals, without enough grazing land, rebuilding the domestic cow herd becomes a lot more difficult.

I've had the same conversation repeatedly with producers across South Dakota: many acres in our state simply aren't living up to their potential in annual crop production. Some fields are highly erodible. Others struggle through dry years or consistently underperform. Not every acre should be expected to do the same job, and some land is simply better suited for grass.

These conversations are what inspired my new legislation, the **Rebuilding America's National Cow Herd (RANCH) Act**.

Current farm policy provides producers with plenty of tools to keep land in crop production, or out, but there's a gap. The RANCH Act fills that gap by creating a voluntary Ranchland Program that helps producers restore eligible marginal cropland to grasslands for grazing.

Most importantly, those struggling acres remain working lands, even though they're no longer used explicitly for crop production. The RANCH Act is not about taking land out of agriculture. It is about using land in a way that makes the most sense for each specific operation. The cattle continue grazing, and the land that works continues to grow the food we need for our world.

When producers have the flexibility to match the right use with the right acres, the benefits extend well beyond the ranch gate. Healthy grasslands improve soil health, reduce erosion, increase water infiltration and make working lands more resilient during drought. They also provide the habitat that supports pheasants, deer, upland birds,

Rebuilding America's Cow Herd Starts with Grassroots Continued...

pollinators and countless other wildlife species that are part of our rural landscape. Those of us who hunt, fish and enjoy the outdoors understand that healthy wildlife populations thrive on a balanced working landscape. The RANCH Act takes steps to provide that.

The program is also intentionally structured to encourage enrollment of the right acres, not the most productive ones.

Annual rental payments are set at 75 percent of the county average dryland cash rental rate because producers continue generating value by grazing livestock on the land. That approach helps make the transition cost-friendly, while making sure the program targets marginal cropland where perennial forage often provides the greatest long-term return for both the producer and the landscape.

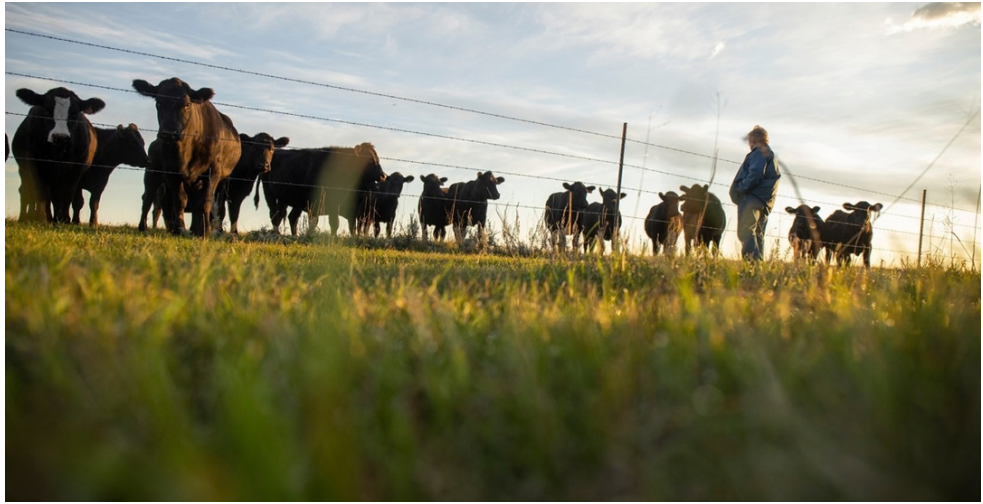
While the RANCH Act is aimed at helping cattle country, the benefits extend well beyond. American families deserve access to safe, affordable, American-raised beef, and this access begins with the ability to produce that food here at home. While rebuilding the domestic herd won't happen overnight, expanding our grazing base is an important step toward strengthening the long-term supply of high-quality beef and making sure America remains the world's leader in beef production.

The RANCH Act is also intentionally targeted toward young cattle producers, many of whom are looking for a way to get started or expand their operation. Families are searching for opportunities to keep sons and daughters involved in agriculture. Every additional grazing acre creates another opportunity to support livestock production and strengthen the future of family ranching. Supporting the industry leaders of tomorrow is just as important as rebuilding the cow herd of today.

A strong cattle industry supports veterinarians, livestock auction markets, feed suppliers, equipment dealers, processors, truck drivers, local restaurants, schools and countless small businesses across rural America. As the domestic herd grows, so does demand for American-grown grain and forage, strengthening markets for crop producers and reinforcing the close partnership between farming and ranching. Strong cow-calf operations help keep rural communities vibrant and make sure agriculture remains the economic backbone of our part of the world.

The RANCH Act reflects the ideas, experience and practical knowledge of ranchers who understand what it takes to raise cattle and take care of the land. It recognizes that conservation and production are not competing priorities they go hand in hand. Healthy grasslands support healthy cattle, healthy wildlife populations, and healthy rural communities.

Rebuilding America's cow herd won't happen because Washington has all the answers. It will happen because we trust the people who know the land best and give them the tools to make the decisions that are right for their operations. When farmers and ranchers succeed, we all succeed.

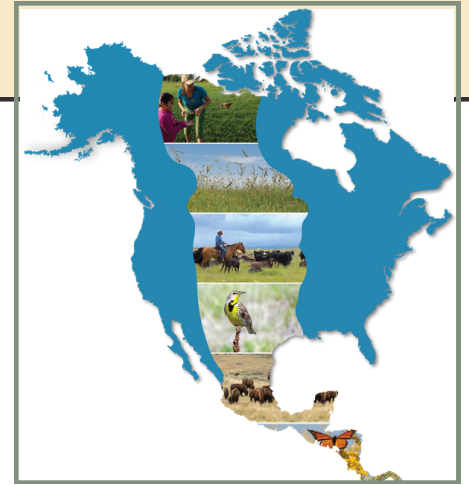


Bringing the Central Grasslands Summit Home: Join a Regional Node in South Dakota

By Laura Kahler

As partners from across the Central Grasslands prepare for the 2026 Central Grasslands Roadmap Initiative (CGRI) Summit in Chihuahua City, Mexico, November 10–12, we're excited to create opportunities to participate closer to home.

We invite you to join a **Regional Summit Node on November 10th** in Rapid City, Pierre and Brookings, hosted by partners of the South Dakota Grasslands Initiative. Regional Nodes are locally organized gatherings designed to bring together the people and organizations working on grassland conservation in a particular region and connect them with the broader Summit conversation. To RSVP, visit www.sdgrassinitiative.org/event-listing/ and click on the Regional Summit Node link under upcoming events.



For us, this is about more than watching the Summit together. It's an opportunity to bring local partners to the same table, strengthen relationships, share what we're learning, and identify the priorities and opportunities that are most important and actionable in our region. Conversations at each Node will help inform the next phase of the Central Grasslands Roadmap and ensure that regional perspectives are part of the biome wide dialogue.

We hope you'll consider using this opportunity to reconnect with colleagues and invite others who may not yet be engaged, including ranchers and land managers, Indigenous and Tribal representatives, conservation organizations, agencies, researchers, land trusts, industry partners, and community leaders.

The Node experience will combine live participation in the Summit with facilitated local discussions, networking, and collaborative planning. Each gathering is intended to be a meaningful one-day experience focused on building connections and identifying actionable ideas for grassland conservation in your region.

We hope you'll join us in bringing the Central Grasslands conversation home, and helping connect the people and partnerships that will be critical to the next chapter of this work.



Sponsorship Opportunity for the Annual Conference & Meeting

We are seeking sponsors for this year's annual conference and meeting. Each year, the South Dakota Grassland Coalition hosts an annual meeting for its members. We make it a priority to provide a high level of value to our members at each meeting by bringing in agricultural business professionals to educate and challenge our members to think outside the box.



The 2026 Grasslands in Action Conference brings together producers, land managers, and ag professionals for two days of practical ideas, meaningful connections, and strategies that can be put to work on the ranch. Centered around this year's theme, "Grasslands in Action: Confident Decisions in Uncertain Times," the conference will focus on helping producers build resilient operations and confidently navigate changing conditions. This year's event will feature keynote presentations and breakout sessions covering grazing management, livestock handling, ranch profitability, drought and risk management, family transitions, leadership, and more. Featured speakers include fourth-generation Montana agricultural producer, rancher, author, and longtime leader in the cattle industry, Ray Marxer; low-stress livestock handling expert Dr. Tom Noffsinger, DVM; regenerative rancher, consultant and professional speaker, Alejandro Carrillo; and Managing Attorney at Thompson Law, PLLC, - a law firm focused on estate planning and succession - Clint Fischer.

If you would like to become a sponsor, visit <https://sdgrass.org/grassland-management-conference/>.



NATIVE PLANT OF THE MONTH

Click on the image of the flower for a full printable version, courtesy of the SDSU Native Plant Initiative!

Prairie Spiderwort, also called narrowleaf spiderwort, strongly resembles bracted spiderwort but differs in that it has slightly narrower leaves and is more freely branching. It is confined to more droughty sandy soils, restricting its distribution. Bracted spiderwort and prairie spiderwort are often difficult to separate.

Source: Grassland Plants of South Dakota and the Northern Great Plains, [SDSU Ext.](#)



**SOUTH DAKOTA
STATE UNIVERSITY**
Native Plant Initiative

PRAIRIE SPIDERWORT

Tradescantia occidentalis

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- News from the SD Section of the Society for Range Management

SD Society for Range Management Hosts Ranch Tour and Annual Meeting

by Kaylee Wheeler

The South Dakota section of the Society for Range Management (SRM) is hosting their annual meeting on Wednesday October 21st, 2026 in Rapid City, SD.

The day will begin with a tour of last year's Area IV Excellence in Range Management Award winners, Riley and Jimmie Kammerer of Piedmont, SD. This award is designed to highlight outstanding rangeland managers across the state of South Dakota. A visit to the Kammerer operation will take place from 2:00 to 3:30 pm (MT) and is free for participants to attend.

The SD SRM business meeting will begin at 4:30 pm (CT) in Rapid City, SD (exact location to be determined). Discussion of the group's activities from the past year, scholarships for youth, endowment funds, and officer/board member elections will take place at this time.

Supper begins at 6:00 pm (CT) and will feature a presentation from the South Dakota High School Youth Forum delegate. Jesse Schoon, of White River, SD won first place in the annual Rangeland and Soil Days speaking contest in June, 2026. Schoon will represent South Dakota at the National Society for Range Management meeting on Feb. 14–18, 2027, in Wichita, Kansas. He will participate and compete among other high school students from across the nation in the High School Youth Forum.

Following supper, the crazy auction and social time begins at 7:00 pm (CT). The crazy auction is used to raise funds for student scholarships. Participants are encouraged to bring items for auctioning off among each other. Put the "crazy" in crazy auction by volunteering your friends to bid on items.

Additional Information:

You DO NOT have to be a SD SRM member to attend this event. However, registration and RSVP are required for supper. This will be found on the SD SRM website: <https://www.sdrangelands.com/annual-meeting.html>

The most up to date details will be made available on the "South Dakota Society for Range Management" Facebook page.

Questions? Contact:

Logan Vandermark, logan.vandermark@sdstate.edu or
Ryan Knutson, ryan.knutson@usda.gov or
Kaylee Wheeler, kaylee.wheeler@sdstate.edu





Judge Jessop
221 N Main
Box 401
Presho, SD 57568

CONTACT US ANY TIME WITH
QUESTIONS OR REQUESTS

Phone: 605-280-0127
Email: communications@sdgrass.org
Website: sdgrass.org



A SPECIAL NOTE TO OUR VALUED MEMBERS

Your support helps keep this work moving forward. The future of South Dakota's grasslands, ranches, and rural communities depends on continued care, collaboration, and commitment—and we're grateful to have you with us on that journey. We welcome your feedback and invite you to reach out anytime—whether you're looking for more information, want to suggest a topic, or just have ideas to share. And as always, we encourage you to stay involved, spread the word, and help others connect with our work.