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A voluntary partnership with private landowners

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The Osguthorpe flock grazes the ski slopes near Park City, Utah.
Photo by Gary Gerth.

A Utah Success Story

Making Recreation & Agriculture Compatible

By Kindra Gordon

It's been an all-too-common occurrence: Usually, when development for housing or recreation moves into an area, it is at the expense of agriculture – which is forced to move out.

But, near Park City, Utah, Steve Osguthorpe and his family have worked with developers to maintain their sheep operation and make it compatible with the nearby ski resort – The Canyons – which has grown to be North America's fifth largest ski area.

As one would expect, snow skiing is the primary activity on the mountainous land during the winter months, but in the summer and fall, nearly 3,000 sheep graze the grassy ski runs and resort lands – even while tourists enjoy the scenic beauty of the area.

"Recreation and agriculture can be compatible," says Osguthorpe of the unique arrangement. He reports that it's been a win-win situation for his family farm and for the resort.

"The developers of the resort wanted to keep the area neutral, and visitors really seem to enjoy seeing the sheep out grazing," he says. Keeping agricultural use on the land has also helped the resort keep their taxes lower.

For the Osguthorpe family, the arrangement has meant they can stay in the area that Steve's father, Dr. D.A. Osguthorpe, first established the ranch on in the late 1940s. As another benefit, Osguthorpe says, "It's an opportunity to show the public that we ranchers are stewards of the land and want to take care of it better than anyone else."

A LONG HISTORY OF STEWARDSHIP

Of the region that now attracts over 500,000 visitors each year, Osguthorpe admits many people might have sold their ranch and moved to a less touristy area, but he says his family has made the decision to stay. He tells that his father, who graduated as a veterinarian from Colorado State University in 1943, had foresight early on that Park City would likely be a resort town someday.

"From his experience in Colorado, he saw places like Estes Park and recognized the potential in Utah. When he came to Park City, he was the vet for horses used in the mines, and eventually he was able to buy seven ranches around Park City from 1945 to 1951," Osguthorpe says.

He adds, "My dad always knew the potential of the area for recreation development."

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A Utah Success Story

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Steve Osguthorpe

But in the early years, agriculture was the primary land use and the Osguthorpe family operated a dairy. Steve added sheep to the farm when he was in junior high. He then attended Utah State University and earned a degree in Animal Science before returning to the family farm and marrying his wife Vickie, a local Park City girl, in the 1970s. This generation of Osguthorpes continued to operate the dairy as they raised six sons and one daughter.

However, by the late 1980s, Park City began to develop around them. When the road needed to be widened, the Osguthorpes' 200-head dairy was taken through a process called condemnation. Then, through the same process, 40 acres of their land was taken for a middle school. "We haven't sold any ground, it's been taken through condemnation," says Osguthorpe.

Eventually, the Osguthorpes relocated their farm headquarters to the town of Delta, 140 miles southwest of Salt Lake City. Today, this ranch serves as their winter location where they also operate a feedlot for cattle and their Columbia-Rambouilet crossbred sheep. But, in the summer months livestock still graze up near Park City on Forest Service permits and on the Osguthorpe land the ski resort now has access to through an easement.

"Our family made the decision if we were going to farm and ranch here, we had to get involved in recreation, or else sell out and leave," Osguthorpe adds.

MAKING IT WORK

Despite the changing of the times from agricultural to development uses, the Osguthorpes have found ways to make the multiple land uses work.

First established as a small ski area by a company called Park West, the ski resort that neighbored their land was bought out by the American Skiing Company and renamed The Canyons about eight years ago. It was at that time the development moved into high gear.

But, to do so, the new resort needed more land, which they were able to gain access to through an easement from the Osguthorpe family. However, in making the arrangements, Osguthorpe, who serves as vice president of Utah Farm Bureau and on the board of the Utah Grazingland Network, was able to be hired as a consultant in overseeing management of the land – and keeping the option to graze it.

"I was worried about the mountain streams, the wildlife and the grazing. When snow melts in spring, that's where we get our water. So, I put that as top priority to protect the land and the vegetation even though the area was being developed," he says.

For instance, as new ski runs were cut and lifts put in, he worked to develop a grass seed mix to quickly revegetate the slopes. As a result, Osguthorpe reports that they now have more forage available than before the development, and he has actually been able to increase the number of sheep grazing the area.

Gary Gerth, Field Director of the Utah Grazingland Network (which is the state's GLCI organization that incorporated as a 501 C (3) non-profit in 1999, and has a 15-member Board of Trustees, of which nine members are either ranchers or ranch managers), reports that Osguthorpe's reclamation efforts of these disturbed sites has been outstanding. They operate at an elevation where Canada thistle usually flourishes due to a soil disturbance, but very little Canada thistle is to be seen," he says.

Osguthorpe's reseeding process at work.

Osguthorpe's reseeding process includes broadcasting a grass-alfalfa mix over an area promptly after it has been disturbed. Then a 2-inch-deep mulch of straw is hand spread over the site, and sheep are trailed over the reseeded areas to work the seed into the soil. The following spring these areas are not grazed, and in time the introduced species give way to native species.

From his experiences, Osguthorpe says, "I'm really in favor of management of land. Where we graze or log, we can see the benefits to the land. There is just more wildlife and more forage production," Osguthorpe adds.

A typical year now includes lambing the sheep near the ranch headquarters at Delta in early May, and then moving the herd of about 3,000 head to the ski resort by June 1. Some of the sheep may be moved to Forest permit allotments around July 1; and, then the entire group is returned to the ski area to graze off the ski runs in September and October. Roundups are conducted in the resort parking lot.

Guard dogs are also an important part of the operation and are used to control mountain lions and coyotes. "Without our guard dogs we wouldn't be in business today," Osguthorpe says.

While this family farm operation has endured amidst the winter ski runs and summer horseback and mountain bike trails, Osguthorpe says he hopes the biggest lesson to other producers and landowners is that multiple uses such as these can co-exist with livestock grazing.

The ski resort parking lot is used for a sheep roundup and processing center in the fall.

An Educational Opportunity

While most producers might view sharing their land with the public as a burden, Utah's Steve Osguthorpe has turned it into an opportunity.

"By staying here, we've had the opportunity to educate the public," he says of the arrangement to keep his sheep on land now used by a popular ski resort.

Osguthorpe has even had the chance to share his story with some well-known people. For instance, during the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City, the Today Show and evening news with Tom Brokaw were broadcast from The Canyons, the resort the Osguthorpes are working with. "We got to know Katie Couric and Al Roker and some of the others quite well. We took them snowmobiling and out on horseback, and they were all impressed that the area was developed, but yet has been kept so natural," Osguthorpe says.

This past summer Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton also visited the Osguthorpe's and toured a forest rehabilition project that is underway. Again, Osguthorpe says this was an opportunity to share, firsthand with a political decision-maker, the important benefits of production agriculture on the land.

Because of their ability to adapt to the tourism industry around them, the Osguthorpes have also been able to keep all of their children involved in the farm operation. The four oldest sons, who have finished college, help with the farm and operate snowmobile tours in

Grazing By The Book

Business advice, grazing strategies, and personal experiences make good fodder for this list of recommended reads.

By Kindra Gordon

Most ranchers would rather get out on the land, than sit and read about it. But, there are several books available that offer a valuable ranch-oriented or business-minded lesson or two. The following list provides a short synopsis of some of the ranch industry's best bets for books.

No Risk Ranching by Greg Judy.

Based on his personal experience, Judy, a rancher from Missouri, shows how to make a living from the land without owning it. In this useful guide, Judy shares how he went from the threat of foreclosure on a 250-acre farm in 1996 to a profitable cattle operation that today includes contract grazing for other people on 2,800 acres of leased land. Judy shares how to find idle land to lease; calculate the cost of a lease; write a land lease contract; lower risk through custom grazing; promote wildlife; and keep accurate records.

Knowledge Rich Ranching and **Grass Farmers** both by Allan Nation.

As publisher of the popular *Stockman-Grass Farmer* publication in the Southeast, Nation is an icon with dedicated graziers. In the book *Knowledge Rich Ranching*, he shares lessons on profit potential in the cattle industry for forward thinkers, and says, "Today, it is knowledge that separates the rich from the rest." This book profiles real ranchers and the methods they've used to achieve financial success in the ranching business today and provides guidelines on how to read and profit from the cattle cycle.

In the book *Grass Farmers*, Nation shares the success stories of 37 producers from across the country and how they are running their operations – be it with hogs, sheep or cattle. Each example offers a wealth of ideas for other producers to better maximize forage use in their own operation.

To order any of the three books profiled above visit www.stockmangrassfarmer.com

Man Must Measure – Livestock Production by Jan Bonsma.

Out of print since 1983, this popular book is once again available for purchase. It was written by South African animal science professor and researcher Jan Bonsma, who is famed internationally for his knowledge of the relationship of cattle to their environment and to each other. This book outlines beef animal growth characteristics, environmental impacts and fertility, among other traits. *Available for $20 plus shipping at www.bovineengineering.com*

Beyond the Rangeland Conflict: Toward a West that Works by Dan Dagget.

An environmental activist for 20 years, Dagget presents the radical idea in this book that people – even people from groups who have considered themselves adversaries for more than a century – can be more effective at getting what they want by working together than by fighting against one another. He highlights ten real-life examples of environmentalists and ranchers working together on issues of open space, endangered species and environmental restoration to develop the best of both worlds for the range, the ranchers and the public.

Similarly, **Ranching West of the 100th Meridian: Culture, Ecology and Economics** by Richard Knight, Wendell Gilgert and Ed Marston, discusses how ranching, if done wrong, has the capacity to hurt the land. But if done right, ranching has the power to restore ecological integrity to Western lands. This book also offers ideas to improve ranching in view of today's realities such as more interaction and better communication between ranchers and urban communities.

Both available at Amazon.com.

Business-Minded Reads

Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap...and Others Don't by Jim Collins

The Real Estate Game: The Intelligent Guide to Decision-Making and Investment by William Poorvu and Jeffrey Cruikshank

Although these are untraditional ranch reads, they share applicable ideas for the ag industry. The first book poses the question: "Can a good company become a great company and if so, how?" and then profiles dozens of examples from companies who have succeeded. The second book listed is suited to anyone considering buying real estate – including ranch land. It provides an insider's perspective on how to spot real estate risks and develop strategies that provide protection and adequate investment returns.

Both available at Amazon.com.

THE CHAIR'S CORNER

Bob Drake

The National GLCI Steering Committee had a successful annual spring meeting March 22 in Washington, D.C. We would like to thank several agency leaders for their participation in this event, including Thomas Weber, Associate Chief, NRCS; Larry Clark, Deputy Chief Science and Technology, NRCS; Carole Jett, Associate Deputy Chief of Programs, NRCS; Fran Cherry, Deputy Chief of Operation, BLM; Ed Knipling, ARS Operation; Dick Lindonmoth representing USFS Chief Dale Bosworth; Steve Williams, director USF&WS; as well as AJ Dye with CSREES, and NRCS's Mitch Flanagan and Dennis Thompson. This was an exceptional group of leaders gathered in one place to discuss grazing issues.

In addition to the D.C. meeting, the GLCI booth has had a presence at several spring events including the National Farmers Union convention in Billings, MT, the Louisiana Cattlemen's Association's Southeast Beef Industry Symposium, Baton Rouge, LA, and the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers convention.

Looking ahead, the GLCI committee plans to focus on working more closely with ARS and Cooperative State Research Education and Extension Service (CSREES) on research and education priorities. This is Phase 2 of GLCI's original charter, along with the technical assistance provided to private landowners.

Based on the success of the recent Second National Grazing Conference in Nashville, the committee also plans to host a third National Conference on Grazing Lands in December 2006 in St. Louis, MO. The National GLCI Steering Committee will convene again in early September, when Texas hosts the annual fall business meeting in Fort Worth.

Have a great summer!

Bob Drake, Chairman
National GLCI Steering Committee

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Visit the GLCI homepage at http://www.glci.org

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