

FEATURE – RANCHERS PUSH FOR CONSERVATION HELP

INTRO: At a recent cattlemen's conference (February 2006 in Denver, Colorado), ranchers talked about the need for more U.S. Department of Agriculture conservation help on grazing lands. The USDA's Pat O'Leary has more.

AT CATTLEMEN'S CONFERENCES, LIKE THIS ONE IN DENVER, COLORADO, RANCHERS CONTINUE TO PUSH FOR MORE FEDERAL INVESTMENT TO HELP THEM MAINTAIN THEIR LANDS AND THEIR LIVELIHOODS. LIKE CROP PRODUCERS, RANCHERS WANT THEIR SHARE OF FINANCIAL, TECHNICAL AND RESEARCH HELP FROM THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE'S NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE. THROUGH THE GRAZING LANDS CONSERVATION INITIATIVE, OR GLCI, THEY STRESS THE IMPORTANCE OF STEWARDSHIP EFFORTS ON RANCHES.

Bob Drake, Oklahoma Rancher: GLCI is conservation, on the ground and research and education to make it better, to better manage these millions and millions of acres of grazing. It has to do with more dollars into the areas that we know will come back to pay us 10, 20, 30 to 1.

WITH BUDGET CUTS LOOMING IN THE NEXT FARM BILL, GRAZING LANDS CONSERVATION INITIATIVE MEMBERS SAY THEY NEED TO AMPLIFY THEIR MESSAGE.

Bob Lee, Montana Rancher: We're going to have some cuts in the federal '07 budget, the farm bill. Conservation expects to maybe have a bit of that cut. But I think maybe we need to bring awareness to other people of the value that conservation brings to us. The American taxpayer allows us to use some of their money down on the ground to take care of that greatest renewable resource we have, our grazing lands.

Dresden Petty, Iowa Rancher: We've included buffer strips, waterways, terracing, we use contour farming. With the cattle operation we've put different water systems in to separate our pastures into paddocks. We use rotational grazing so we try not to overgraze anything. We've also increased the wildlife populations.

LIVESTOCK PRODUCERS ARE ALSO PART OF A PILOT PARTNERSHIP CALLED: "WALK A MILE IN MY BOOTS." RANCHERS IN FIVE WESTERN STATES ARE TRADING JOBS WITH FEDERAL CONSERVATIONISTS TO LEARN MORE ABOUT EACH OTHERS' ISSUES.

Merlyn Carlson, USDA Deputy Under Secretary for Natural Resources & Environment: As we talk about "Walk A Mile In My Boots," I couldn't help but think: that's one small step by us but a giant step for cooperative conservation.

FOR THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, I'M PAT O'LEARY.