



Building Resilience from the Ground Up: How Grazing Management Supports Climate Solutions

Provided by the U.S. Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (USRSB) in recognition of the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP).

by Karley Williams

The April 2026 theme of *the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP)*, "Climate and Resilience," highlights a critical reality.

Across the globe, ranchers and pastoralists are navigating increased weather variability along with shifting ecosystems, among other pressures such as economic uncertainty. Strengthening resilience in these systems requires practical tools and adaptive management strategies, along with a deeper understanding of how land, livestock and people interact.

One of the most valuable tools available to producers is the written grazing management plan (GMP) – not simply as a document, but as a process that supports long-term ecological and economic sustainability.

A Global Perspective: Resilience Starts with Management

From the grasslands of Argentina to the rangelands of East Africa, producers face diverse challenges shaped by climate and policy. Yet a common thread unites them. Resilient grazing systems are built through intentional management.

Healthy rangelands play a vital role in supporting thriving ecosystems. They store carbon and support biodiversity while also improving water infiltration and reducing erosion, among other benefits. These ecosystem services ultimately depend on how land is grazed, rested and managed over time.

Globally, there is growing recognition that grazing lands are a key part of the solution.

Balancing Ecology, Economics and Legacy

In the U.S., cattle producers operate within their own unique set of challenges and opportunities.

According to Jeff Goodwin, PhD, director of the Center for Grazinglands and Ranch Management with Texas A&M AgriLife Research & Extension, long-term success in the cow-calf sector depends on balancing three core priorities:

- Ecological sustainability: protecting soil health, forage resources and biodiversity
- Economic viability: maintaining profitability in a fluctuating market

- Social sustainability: ensuring operations support quality of life and generational transfer

“Producers aren’t just managing cattle,” Goodwin explains. “They’re stewarding complex ecosystems while running a business.”

Today, that balancing act is becoming more difficult as producers contend with various pressures alongside the conversion of grazing lands to other uses.

The Value of Grazing Management Plans (GMPs)

While grazing management plans are often discussed as technical documents, their true value lies in the planning process itself.

Goodwin emphasizes that successful producers are not defined by rigid plans, but by their ability to adapt.

A written GMP helps producers:

- Define clear goals and objectives
- Inventory available resources (land, water, livestock, forage)
- Evaluate management options
- Implement strategies and monitor outcomes
- Adjust based on weather, markets and ecological feedback

“It’s not the piece of paper that matters,” Goodwin notes. “It’s going through the process and staying flexible.”

This adaptability is essential in a changing environment. Producers who actively plan, and revise those plans, are better equipped to respond to pressures as they arise, such as shifting seasons and market volatility.

Grazing, Carbon and Land Resilience

As the role of grazing systems in maintaining healthy landscapes becomes clearer, they are gaining recognition not just for their use, but for the ecosystem services they support and the outcomes they can deliver when managed well.

Grazing management is now central to discussions around carbon sequestration, soil health, and land resilience—and the broader supply chain is starting to take notice.

“For the first time in my career, grazing lands are getting the attention they deserve,” says Goodwin. “People are recognizing the value producers bring beyond just food production.”

A written grazing management plan helps turn that recognition into action. By linking ecological goals with day-to-day decisions, it gives producers a practical framework to apply soil health principles, adapt to changing conditions, and build long-term resilience through intentional stewardship.

Resources and Support for Producers

For producers interested in developing or adapting their written grazing management plans, a variety of resources are available:

- [U.S. Roundtable for Sustainable Beef](#): Offers a Grazing Management Plan Development Module and template in addition to other sustainability tools
- [Natural Resources Conservation Service](#): Provides technical assistance and conservation planning support
- [National Grazing Lands Coalition](#): Connects producers with grazing specialists and educational programs
- [Noble Research Institute](#): Hosts grazing and soil health workshops
- [Ranching for Profit](#): Focuses on financial and ecological decision-making

Learning from peers is an important part of day-to-day decision-making. Some of the most practical insights come from neighbors and fellow ranchers dealing with the same conditions and challenges.

Looking Ahead

The April IYRP theme reinforces a powerful idea: resilience is not built overnight. It is developed through intentional management, continuous improvement and adaptability.

For U.S. cattle producers, written grazing management plans offer a pathway to strengthen both land and livelihood. By focusing on soil health, ecological function and strategic decision-making, producers can position their operations to withstand uncertainty while contributing to thriving ecosystems.

As more attention turns to rangelands, their importance is coming into sharper focus. A grazing management plan may be simple in structure, but it can play a powerful role in strengthening the long-term resilience of grazing systems and the people who depend on them.