

What is the International Year of Rangelands & Pastoralists?

Recognizing the People and Practices That Sustain Grazing Lands

by Karley Williams

Across the beef community, producers take on countless daily responsibilities, from monitoring forage and water to adapting to weather, markets and herd needs. With so much happening on the ground, it's easy to miss the broader global conservations that impact rangeland management. That's why 2026 represents an important moment. It has been designated as the International Year of Rangelands & Pastoralists (IYRP), a global effort to spotlight the value of rangelands and the people who care for them.

While an international celebration, the message hits close to home for U.S. ranchers. The IYRP aims to elevate the contributions of ranchers and pastoralists worldwide, and American cattle producers, who manage some of the most diverse rangelands on earth, are a critical part of the story.

Globally, the language used to describe these landscapes and livelihoods can vary. Rangelands can be referenced in many ways, in many different regions (i.e., grazinglands and grasslands). Similarly, the people who manage them may be referred to as a variety of things as well – ranchers, beef producers, shepherds, or pastoralists. While the terminology differs, the underlying principle is the same: people working in close relationship with the land to produce food while sustaining natural resources and supporting local communities.

What is IYRP?

The International Year of Rangelands & Pastoralists (IYRP) is a yearlong global awareness and education initiative focused on the health, resilience and economic importance of the world's rangelands. These landscapes (grasslands, prairies, shrublands and deserts) support billions of people through food production, biodiversity, carbon storage and rural livelihoods. In fact, more than half of the world's land surface is used as rangeland, according to the 2021 Rangeland Atlas.

By declaring a global celebration in IYRP, the United Nations is acknowledging a simple but often overlooked truth: healthy rangelands don't happen by accident. They depend on the people who manage them every day.

Pastoralism and Ranching: A Shared Heritage

At the heart of the IYRP is pastoralism, a land-based way of life where livestock production relies on natural forage and adaptive grazing strategies. Pastoralists move or adjust their

herds in sync with the land, responding to seasons, drought cycles, plant recovery and water availability.

This isn't a foreign concept to American ranchers. In fact, it reflects exactly what happens across U.S. rangelands every day. Whether it's rotating pastures or balancing herd needs with forage conditions, ranchers are practicing a form of modern-day pastoralism grounded in science, tradition and local knowledge.

By connecting pastoralists worldwide, including U.S. cattle producers, IYRP highlights a shared commitment to grazing as a tool for land stewardship, not simply livestock production.

[To see pastoralism in action across different regions and production systems, watch the short video linked here.](#)

Why Celebrating Stewards Matters

One of the core principles of the U.S. Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (USRSB) is that sustainability begins with people, specifically, the producers who care for the land, water, wildlife, and communities tied to beef production. The IYRP reinforces this idea on a global stage.

Grazing done well improves soil health, supports biodiversity, maintains open space and keeps grazinglands intact. However, these outcomes only happen because ranchers make daily decisions rooted in long-term stewardship. IYRP showcases producers and their stewardship practices while reinforcing that responsible land management is a strength of the U.S. beef industry, not a challenge it's trying to overcome.

Looking Ahead

The International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists offers a rare opportunity to connect local ranching practices with global movement. USRSB is proud to highlight our industry's progress and on-the-ground management decisions that contribute to healthier landscapes, stronger rural communities and a more resilient beef supply chain.

In the U.S., IYRP isn't just a global celebration – it's a chance to reaffirm what we've always known: Healthy rangelands depend on the people who steward them.