

*The concept of IRM has the industry buzzing,  
but some producers still ponder...*

# What's in it for Me?

by Troy Smith

**I**n Integrated Resource Management (IRM) has been a hot topic during the past year. Beef industry leaders continue to sing its praises and IRM ranks high on the National Cattlemen's Association (NCA) priority list. Publications that serve this industry have devoted considerable space to report on the growth and development of the IRM philosophy.

Not long ago, this very publication presented a story ("People Helping People," February '91) about Martin Jorgensen, chairman of the National IRM Coordinating Committee. Jorgensen leads the pack in promoting the concept of optimizing resources. And that is the root of IRM.

So with all this hoopla, only a sheltered few could have escaped the flood of information about IRM. Even old Uncle Pete, who lives way back in the hills, has heard a little bit about it. But Pete is like a lot of other cowmen out there who are saying, "So what? What's IRM going to do for me?"

Missouri cattleman Marshall McGregor says producers in his area have been asking the same question. "When they started calling Missouri the 'Show Me State,' they were sure enough right," says McGregor. "You have to prove the worth of any new idea before it's accepted in Missouri. But more folks are realizing that IRM, when used properly, can really help you make money."

McGregor is president of Circle F Cattle Company, a commercial cow-calf operation located near Richland, Mo. Circle F's primary objective is raising and marketing replacement quality females. The operation includes 5,500 acres of grass divided into small pastures. The many small pastures and

several roads crossing the property create the need for miles and miles of fence. With so much fence comes much fence mending and McGregor says he just couldn't keep up. Through the IRM process, however, he found a solution to the dilemma.

"By sharing ideas with folks with similar problems, you can often find solutions," McGregor says. "We found a

who have knowledge on a particular subject," McGregor says. "By talking with veterinarians and other producers, we discovered that we needed to vaccinate for vibriosis more than just once each year. That remedied a costly abortion problem in our herd. We also seek advice from Extension personnel, the Soil Conservation Service and occasionally from a professional farm manager. It's just a common sense approach to planning and problem solving."



*Marshall McGregor, Richland, Mo. cattleman, says IRM is a common sense approach to planning and problem solving.*

solution and made the contacts to implement it. We started hiring a custom crew to fix fence, so we could continue haying or working cattle. And now we hire them to replace one mile of fence per year. We decide when we want it done, so it can be paid for out of our cash flow. That's important too, because we don't borrow for operating expenses."

Another example of IRM put to use is McGregor's experience in buying a truck rigged to handle big bales of hay. In this case, the problem was deciding between a gasoline or diesel powered engine. The solution came after gathering information from not only truck dealers, but truck owners with knowledge of both gas and diesel rigs.

"I think an important part of IRM is the process of bouncing ideas off others

**Lawrason Sayre** agrees that IRM is mostly common sense. Raised on his family's Angus farm in Maryland, Sayre was trained as an engineer. When he returned to the farm, Sayre applied the engineer's analytical approach to managing crops and a purebred Angus herd. "Engineering taught me the value of planning and design, so it was only natural that I apply that to my cattle and farming operation," explains Sayre.

"Seeking advice from people with knowledge and experience is just as important to what I do now as it was back when I was involved in building bridges."

Sayre's switch from bridge builder to cattleman occurred some 30 years ago, long before anyone had heard of IRM. But he used the same tactics to build his operation and eventually phase out row crops in favor of a total grass program utilizing intensive grazing.

"I relied on help from Extension, SCS and others from the beginning," says Sayre. "With their help, we made the move to intensive grazing. We're realizing better utilization of forage. We've extended our grazing season by about three months. I think a 10-month grazing season is a realistic goal."

Sayre credits Maryland Extension

specialist Scott Barao with the profitable renovation of fescue/orchardgrass stands. Barao's test plots demonstrated the value of overseeding with legumes. Sayre says dry matter yields have nearly doubled and forage protein content has been increased by three percent. Nitrogen-fixing legumes have decreased the need for nitrogen fertilizer, thus reducing input costs.

"With help from SCS, we've placed some additional water tanks so we can graze our hayfields," says Sayre. "We'll take two cuttings of hay and come back later to graze the regrowth. We're fencing the stream banks in those fields, too. In all, we're getting better utilization and preventing erosion by restricting cattle access to the streams. This is complementing our area's Chesapeake Bay conservation program."

Maryland still lacks an organized IRM program for getting producers and specialists together as a problem solving team. Sayre is working primarily through the state cattlemen's association to further an appreciation for the IRM philosophy and team approach. Team members can be anyone whose expertise could prove beneficial to achieving the goal. And, in Sayre's opinion, an accountant is a valuable team member.

"Our accountant has been drawn deeper into our own operation," Sayre says. "That input, plus the addition of computerized recordkeeping, has been a big asset. We use the computer a lot now, particularly since my son built some programs utilizing the National Angus Sire Evaluation information. With that on disk, we can run some test matings and figure out where we want to go with our breeding program."

**In Nebraska**, the thrust has been toward organization of localized IRM teams. Tom Marcy, Hay Springs, is one of more than 20 Panhandle producers comprising one team. Their group started little more than a year ago, stemming from an initial meeting organized by the Nebraska Cattlemen Association and Extension personnel.

"The effort floundered for a time before it found its feet and started to run," explains Marcy. "Now it's proving to be really worthwhile. It's a mix of classroom and outside sessions. We make ranch visits for hands-on experience and we sometimes meet just

## Where Do I Sign Up?

**I**ntegrated Resource Management is gaining momentum as growing numbers of producers, Extension specialists and veterinarians jump on the band wagon. Driving the wagon is Mike Smith, research and technical services coordinator for the National Cattlemen's Association (NCA). Based in NCA's Denver office, Smith coordinates the association's IRM involvement.

"My role is to handle calls from the country — calls that still come in at the rate of four or five each day," explains Smith. "I try to provide producers with answers on how to become involved in the IRM movement."

In addition, Smith has to keep tabs on nearly 30 states who have initiated IRM programs. He assists with the production of the IRM newsletter and generally tries to stimulate greater involvement at the local level. Another of Smith's chores is seeking financial assistance.

"MSD-AGVET has been a big supporter of IRM," Smith says. "Through its 'seed money' sponsorship, the company provides \$1,000 grants to states developing IRM programs."

A recent tally of MSD-AGVET contributions showed 16 states had received seed money and another seven states were awaiting approval of funding. MSD-AGVET is the sole sponsor of the IRM red book, the widely used pocket-size record book. The animal health firm's total IRM contribution during 1990 totaled \$100,000.

When asked where IRM is headed, Smith says the current push is for development of a standardized production/financial analysis system.

The goal is to get everyone talking the same language," he says. "If we can develop a standardized method of capturing information, we can create a national data base accessible to nearly everyone. Federal funding in the amount of \$100,000 has been approved to help fund an analysis system, so we're really going to push now. We're hoping to have the whole system finalized by the NCA convention in January 1992."

**Among the states** recognized as

leaders in the IRM initiative is Colorado, whose state program was born in 1983. Colorado State University Extension specialist Garth Boyd has been involved from the beginning.

"Colorado initiated IRM through the demonstration herd program," says Boyd. "I served as IRM program director for four years. We're now trying to involve more people through a more localized team concept. We have three teams (Eastern, Intermountain and Western) and I'm the program director for the Intermountain team."

Boyd is proud of the way Colorado producers have received the IRM concept. Through team-taught workshops and field days, participants are learning from one another. With more than 3,200 copies in use, Colorado has distributed more IRM red books than any other state. Still, Boyd is searching for ways to expose more producers to the IRM philosophy.

"IRM is time intensive," Boyd says. "It requires an investment of time to build trust, confidence and friendship among team members. Managing land, cattle and capital is relatively easy, while managing human resources can be tough. However, human resources are the most important."

Like Smith, Boyd is anxious to see a standardized system for economic analysis. But the value of such a system depends on the input provided by IRM participants. IRM is not a recipe for success, but a concept dependent upon participants' willingness to share information.

**"For IRM to succeed**, it has to be producer-driven," Boyd says. "Producers have to want to get together, along with veterinarians and a few professors, to discuss problems and share information. That has to start at the local level. IRM is crying out for local leadership, so local cattlemen's organizations had better listen. Here's an opportunity to play an important role."

For more information on the IRM program, contact Mike Smith, NCA, (303) 694-0305; or your state cattlemen's organization.

## Little Red (Not Black) Book Belongs in Shirt Pocket

Cowboys will replace the little black book in their shirt pocket with a little red book if Jack Whittier, Missouri Extension beef cow-calf specialist has his way,

The red book is free to cattle producers participating in the Integrated Resource Management program. The book is not for recording dates for Saturday night but for recording the dates when calves are born, cows are bred and dozens of other bits of cow-herd management information.

"The starting point for making improvements in a beef herd is to know what's happening in the herd," Whittier says. "The red book provides a place for recording that information."

The small 3-by-5 inch book has pages of forms for recording such information as calving dates, birthweight, calving ease, calf vaccination, parasite control, weaning data, as well as information on the herd bulls and cows.

"Cattle producers have the best of intentions to record this information," Whittier

says, "but when they get back to the house at night, they forget to write it down. If they have the book with them all of the time, they're more likely to write it down."

In return for getting the free date book, cattle producers are asked to provide a year-end summary of their calf production. That information is used to help develop Extension educational programs to overcome problem areas in cattle production.

"We can use the records to show producers where the

problems are," Whittier says. "Being from the Show Me state, Missouri producers are more likely to change their management if they see information from their own herds."

The main problems are too many unproductive cows without calves, too long calving season, slow growing calves and too high death loss.



*A pocketful of beef-cow herd information is kept in a little red book by Brent Booker, manager of the University of Missouri Wurdack Farm near Cook Station, Mo. The book, a part of the Integrated Resource Management system, provides space for recording information on cows and calves in the beef herd.*

In addition to recording information on their beef herds, cattle producers are encouraged to join or form local Integrated Resource Management (IRM) groups. The groups call on local suppliers, veterinarians and Extension specialists to help solve beef production problems.

Producers can obtain copies of the IBM red book by contacting their area Extension livestock specialist.

The IRM books have been distributed on a trial basis for four years, Whittier says. Starting in 1990, all states are using the same format in recording information from the individual herd books.

This will allow the tabulation of national information on beef cow herd management.

The program is coordinated by a National Integrated Resource Management committee supported by the National Cattlemen's Association.

The back of the book has space for addresses and phone numbers of veterinarians, feed dealers—and anyone else who belongs in a little black book

—*Duane Dailey, University of Missouri*

to share ideas around the table."

Marcy says most spouses also participate in the sessions that deal with a wide range of subjects. Alternative crops to the usual wheat, corn and alfalfa have been discussed. Sessions on bull and heifer selection and development have been extremely popular. Other topics have included animal health, computers and software, plus estate planning.

"We average one meeting per month and we haven't had a poor one yet," Marcy says. "We haven't been at it all that long, but we've learned a lot. We've certainly become more aware of the importance of bookkeeping. We're now going to computerized enterprise analysis so we can evaluate each part of our operation."

The group is comparing input and production for every enterprise. That includes their purebred herd, their yearling program and every cultivated field.

"We've learned that we are not low-cost cattle producers. We have some work to do in that area, but some of our analysis has convinced us that we are doing some things right. Our production cost per calf may be \$50 higher than for a commercial rancher, but the premium we receive on seedstock sales balances the scales.

"Most of our active team members are producers, but certainly not all," Marcy adds. "We even have a banker involved because he wants to learn more about the production side. Gathering input from varied segments

helps all of us to learn."

Marcy says most of his team members will agree that the initial benefit from IRM team involvement is the attitude adjustment. Active involvement seems to expand the participant's vision and make that person more receptive to ideas other than his or her own.

**For the person asking, 'What's in it for me?'** Tom Marcy has an answer.

"You've got to be open-minded enough to try," he says. "You've got to be willing to take a look at new ideas be receptive when seeking solutions to problems. Maybe it's this...what you get out of IBM depends on what you put into it."

AJ