**Historic Trends in Livestock Stocking Rates and Precipitation on Santa Rita Experimental Range**

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**Introduction**

To what extent have long-term changes in livestock stocking rates been driven by management decisions to achieve sustainability versus simple fluctuations in precipitation and the resulting forage production?

**Methods**

The relationship between trends in stocking rates and fluctuation in precipitation were compared to evaluate the relative influence of management decisions in contrast to fluctuations in precipitation.

- Choose five pastures along an elevation gradient.
- Summarized livestock stocking rates for the pastures as Animal Unit Years per hectare (AUY \( \cdot \text{ha}^{-1} \)) from 1916 to 2004.
- Calculated the mean annual precipitation using the three nearest rain gauges. Linear regression was used to estimate values when data was missing.
- Missing values for stocking rate occur because the historic data has not yet been located.

**Results and Discussion**

**Grazing**

- Stocking rates have fewer AUY \( \cdot \text{ha}^{-1} \) in the drier (lower elevation) pastures.
- Beginning in 1940, stocking rate decline 25 to 50%, with the least declines in the driest pasture (Pasture 5N).
- By 1972, seasonal and yearly rotation of stocking occurs in most (except Pasture 1).

**Precipitation**

- There was no distinct change in amount or inter-annual variability of precipitation associated with the decline in stocking that began in 1940.
- The independence of stocking rate changes and precipitation patterns supports the idea that stocking rates have largely been driven by changes in management practices in order to achieve sustainable livestock use.

Specifically, standards for allowable use of yearly forage production were near 70% to the 1940s, and were reduced to 50 to 60% in the 1950-1960s, and further reduced to 40-50% in the 1970s (Ruyle 2003).

**References**


**Acknowledgements**

Data sets were provided by the Santa Rita Experimental Range Digital Database. Funding for the digitization of these data was provided by USDA Forest Service Rocky Mountain Research Station and the University of Arizona. Special thanks to Mark Hettlinger who provided pictures and Mitch McClaran who worked late on his birthday because of this poster.