



..... STRAIGHT FROM THE HORSES MOUTH

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I would normally be writing about National Ag Week which falls this year on March 21. National Ag Day is observed annually for all to recognize and celebrate the abundance provided by agriculture across the United States. American agriculture plays a very critical economic and food security role in our country. It is with a great deal of sadness that I will instead focus on something that really tells the story of the agriculture community and how we help each other in disaster.

I am proud to be a member of an outstanding organization, South Central Cattlemen Association, not only because of their work in the beef industry, education, community service and our youth, but because of the reaction I have witnessed by members of this group concerning helping our neighbors, friends and fellow cattlemen across Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas. For you that haven't been aware -- over two million acres of rangeland have been burned (that is about the same size as the states of Delaware and Rhode Island combined) and unfortunately seven people reported dead, as wildfires ravaged areas of Kansas, Texas, Oklahoma and Colorado, devastating rural communities last week. Ranchers have lost thousands of head of livestock and some lost their entire herds. The fence damage alone has been tremendous and will need to be repaired as soon as possible. And also troubling is that they not only lost grazing land but piles of hay that would be used to feed the animals before the grass was ready. Not to mention homes, facilities and tragically - human life!

The SCCA is actively pulling together money, hay, fencing supplies and anything else they can to help out their fellow ranchers who were hit with this devastating event. They are looking not only for those items but ways to get these much needed supplies to where they are most needed. They are hoping to pull all of this together by Saturday, March 18. I would encourage anyone who can help in any way to get ahold of SCCA President Matt Caldwell at caldwell.cattle@hotmail.com or via mobile phone at 402-469-1190. I understand that the Thayer County Feeders are conducting a similar activity. You can contact Gregg Wiedel in Hebron at 402-768-8919. Even if you read this too late look for a way to help in any way you can, as much help will be needed, continuing into the long future. This is not a short term disaster, but one all of us should feel.

Joining the South Central Cattlemen are hundreds of farmers, ranchers and businessmen from many surrounding states who have or will donate loads of hay for the ranchers in need in the areas ravaged by these wind and drought driven infernos. It is not just hay and other feed, it is fencing material, supplies and monetary donations from all over. You can bet the states in need would help us if the boot were on the other foot! I am proud to say that is not a one-time help - that's just the ranch, farm or rural way! The bottom line in our industry is that you help your neighbor out when they are in need. It is what we do!

If you want to help out but want to go individually to a particular state or region I suggest that you go to this website and you can get further information - <http://www.cattlenetwork.com/news/industry/views-high-plains-fire-aftermath>. Even without the help of news media who seem more focused on political crap rather than a story that so grievously effects the middle of beef country and rural America, the outpouring of support is just huge. For instance a sale barn in Oklahoma sold one steer, who was continually donated back until he brought \$150,000 for this disaster relief. I understand that the McDonald's Corporation was involved. I don't always like some of their antics, but this one I applaud! Under the radar and out of the front news lines of the national news networks, friends and neighbors are helping each other. Youth like FFA Chapters and 4-H Clubs are actively engaged. In fact there a 4-H group in Meade, Kansas has been taking in and caring for orphaned calves. I read about FFA Chapters who came out to roll up wire from fences where posts were burned.

Even our local youth have been involved. Kaydee Caldwell, daughter of Matt and Dawn Caldwell has posted on her Facebook page the following: "My sorority, Sigma Alpha is lucky enough to take part in supporting those who have been devastated by the wildfires. We are looking to get trailers loaded and sent down to Kansas to aid those effected. Details on what you can donate and where to deliver are on the picture. If you are unable to donate supplies but still want to offer much needed support, we have set up a GoFundMe here: <https://www.gofundme.com/9qrz28-kansas-wildfire-relief>."

We must not lose sight of the fact, as sad as it is, that material possessions can be replaced, but the emotional impact that this has had on individuals and the financial impact this has had on their community will be felt for a long time. We should keep in mind that it is not just about them, it is about all of us; and we, as a small populous within these United States, just need to try to dig in and get through it together. This fire in all of its entirety is frightening, sad and makes me sick to my stomach and leaves an ache in my heart. Yet, the little farming and ranching towns that populate this the plains are showing resiliency as neighbors, ranchers and community members band together to rebuild, and support pours in from across the country. This is evidenced by the food and water and truckloads of hay and supplies from people all across the country have already poured in from people who are just trying to help. The good news is that more will soon be on its way!!

Witnesses stress how emotional this time is and how many individuals are finding it difficult to share their pain and hurt. Can you imagine having to verify their death loss and finding people to help gather up dead cattle and dispose of them? Volunteer veterinarians from all over have poured into the area to help them treat livestock on all the ranches. I know that former Red Cloud Veterinarian Dr. Dave Rethorst was involved. I can't imagine what he has experienced. My hat is off to you Dr. Dave! I applaud all the individuals and groups who are stepping up -- this is what really makes Rural America Great!

The preceding information comes from the research and personal observations of the writer, which may or may not reflect the views of UNL or Nebraska Extension. For more further information on these or other topics contact D. A. Lienemann, Nebraska Extension Educator for Webster County in Red Cloud, (402) 746-3417 or email: dlienemann2@unl.edu or on the web at: <http://extension.unl.edu/statewide/webster>