

# Dakota

## FARMER

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**GRASS MANAGERS:** Jim Faulstich checks a spring pasture on Daybreak Ranch, one of three Dakota ranches nominated for an environmental stewardship award.

By LON TONNESON

**T**HREE Dakota ranches are up for the National Cattlemen's Beef Association's 2009 Environmental Stewardship Award this summer. They are:

■ Daybreak Ranch, Highmore, S.D., operated by Jim and Carol Faulstich and their daughter, Jacquie, and her husband, Adam Roth.

■ Slovek Ranch, Philip, S.D., operated by Jim and Pennie Slovek.

■ H.T. Ranch, Amidon, N.D., operated by Wayne and Karen Gerbig and their son, Neil, and his wife, Kari.

Daybreak Ranch represents the excellence found in all three nominees. Some of the things that make Daybreak Ranch stand out include:

**Focus on grass.** Focusing on grass production rather than focusing on calf weaning weights has paid dividends. They've increased forage production and cut costs, and weaning weights

### Key Points

- Three Dakota ranches are in the running for a national award.
- Daybreak Ranch exemplifies the excellence found on all the ranches.
- Focus on grass production has improved the environment and increased profit.

have risen anyway, Jim says.

**Short-duration grazing.** When Jim and Carol bought the ranch 35 years ago, invasive cool-season grasses had taken over pastures. Their dominance was the result of several years of continuous season-long grazing. The Faulstichs and Roths developed a grazing system that alternates short periods of heavy grazing pressure with long periods of rest and recovery. Warm-season western wheatgrass and green needlegrass now dominate the pastures. Big bluestem, purple prairie clover, Maximilian sunflower, leadplant and many other forbs

and grasses are making a comeback.

**Year-round grazing.** The Faulstichs and Roths are sometimes able to graze cows year-round. They plant cover crops and turn cows out on cornstalks to extend the grazing season. Year-round grazing reduces the amount of hay they have to put up, which in turn reduces machinery, labor, fuel, maintenance and other costs.

**Diversification.** The cattle operation includes 350 cow-calf pairs. They background calves to approximately 700 pounds, run yearlings on grass and custom-graze heifers. They also no-till corn, sunflowers, oats and alfalfa, and operate a commercial hunting business.

**Drought strategy.** The Faulstichs and Roths replaced some of their cow-calf pairs with yearlings and custom-grazed heifers. During a drought, they can wean calves early, sell yearlings early or cut back on custom grazing rather than sell cows.

**Win-win management.** The Faulstichs

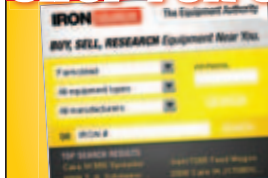
and Roths look for solutions with multiple benefits. "If there is only one beneficial reason for doing something, it's probably not a good enough reason," Jim says. For instance, planting cover crops provides extra grazing, but it also benefits wildlife, and particularly pheasants, which helps bolster the ranch's hunting business.

**Constant improvement.** Jim says his family started out with what most would consider "good" land and made a great ranch. But they have a lot more to learn about managing and utilizing grass. They read avidly, attend all the seminars they can fit into their schedules, and visit with other farmers and ranchers every chance they get. "If we don't learn something every day, then we've had a failure," Jim says.

*Kindra Gordon, Sturgis, S.D., contributed to this article.*

■ Read more about the nominees on pages 4 and 5.

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