

CONSERVATION Showcase

Far From the Thin Walls of Gray Cubicles

The work of NRCS takes us far from the thin walls of gray cubicles into the mountains and prairies and by-ways of New Mexico. We share a love for its people as well as the land - and sometimes one of us takes pen in hand and shares that love with the rest of us. That is the case of the following - written by Randy Donges, range management specialist, in the Clayton field office as he talks about Union County's Billie Mock. It is a lesson in fellowship, stewardship, and range management.

Driving along one of the rural roads in northeastern Union County, New Mexico, one is likely to be met by the friendly wave of William "Billie" Mock as he makes his daily rounds checking cattle and water. His wave is a reflection of his general attitude toward people and the land – open and accessible.

Billie was born in 1931 at the family ranch on land homesteaded by his grandfather more than one hundred years ago. He's been there ever since, except for a four year stint in the Navy in the 1950s. He started ranching on his own in 1957, and through more than half a century he has not only expanded the original family operation, but has developed his own philosophies on just about any topic you can mention.

His ideas on ranching could serve as useful guidelines for anyone interested in producing quality beef cattle while wisely using the resources necessary for producing those cattle.

Expressing his philosophy on cows and calving, Billie likes to say "If one can, they all should." In other



words, he thinks if one cow is able to produce a calf in a given year, conditions must have been acceptable for calf production, so every cow in the herd should have produced one. Therefore, if a cow fails to wean a calf, she earns a trip to town and out of Billie's herd. He says it's a business and not vacation resort for unproductive cows.

His philosophy on grazing and forage management is expressed by another of his favorite sayings that goes "If a cow doesn't have a home on my place, she doesn't belong on my place."

What he means by that is if there isn't enough forage to support all the animals, some of them have to go. Instead of driving to town and buying feed, he'll drive to town and sell cows. That approach is largely responsible for the condition of his range.

He uses his forage moderately when he has plenty of it, and doesn't use it at all when he has little. Decades of operating his ranch with this philosophy has resulted in his rangeland having some of the best plant

productivity and diversity of any in the area, not to mention some of the heaviest calf weaning weights.

Billie rotates his cattle through the different pastures, grouping them by age and production cycle in a system so complex that probably only Billie understands it. But the gist of it is that every pasture gets complete rest from grazing for a significant period of time every year.

His rotation system along with a moderate stocking rate provide a cushion of available forage in short-term drought situations. This enables him to delay destocking to see if the drought breaks, while avoiding the necessity of buying supplemental feed. Billie's system works well for him and is an example of what can be done with careful observation and planning.

Billie is civic-minded and has been active with numerous local organizations and projects. He was a member of the Northeastern Soil and Water Conservation District board from 1964 to 1981 and is a Life Member of the Union County Historical Society.

The old Santa Fe Trail runs through a significant portion of Billie's land. A monument next to the

trail in one of Billie's pastures marks the site of the first recorded Fourth of July celebration on the Great Plains. This site is at McNees Crossing which is a prominent crossing point across the North Canadian River, or Corruppa Creek, as it is known locally.

Billie leaves the gate unlocked to that pasture so the marker and trail are available to the public. Billie enjoys hosting tours of the trail, and he uses those tours as an opportunity to educate the public about natural resources.

Billie has two Grassland Reserve Program contracts with NRCS to help ensure that his rangeland remains undeveloped and in its natural state.

As evidenced by his many civic activities and the numerous awards he has received and the contributions he makes to his community, Billie is a natural resource himself. In the process of using natural resources to produce a product that benefits society, Billie makes his land, his knowledge, and himself available to benefit others. That's the definition of a valuable natural resource, and Union County is fortunate to have such a resource as Billie Mock.