

Livestock production in Lake County dates back to the first Mexican land grant in 1839. As late as the 1950s cowboys were still driving cattle on county roads. Today livestock production continues to make a substantial contribution to the county economy, and pasture and rangelands provide open space and wildlife habitat. Raising livestock is part of the county's rural lifestyle, and Lake County is home to many small "hobby" farms where animals from horses to emus are raised for both profit and pleasure.




While Lake County's total population has increased substantially in recent decades, the agricultural population has remained steady or declined. Therefore, an increasing proportion of the county population is not familiar with livestock operations.

Because ranchers and their non-agricultural neighbors often have different lifestyle and economic goals, some conflicts are inevitable. One way to reduce these conflicts is to improve communication between ranchers and their neighbors.

This leaflet provides information to non-agricultural neighbors about livestock operations, advantages of livestock production, and challenges to livestock producers.

Summary of Local Cattle and Sheep Operations*

WINTER	
<i>Cattle & sheep breeding</i>	Cows have a 9 1/2 month and sheep a 5 month gestation period.
<i>Lambing</i>	Animals born at this time will grow rapidly because there is abundant forage for lactating sheep in spring and for weaned lambs during summer.
<i>Move livestock to foothills</i>	Many livestock are moved from wet, muddy lower ground to prevent destruction of lowland pastures and hoof rot.
<i>Supplemental feeding</i>	Hay and commercial feed supplements are fed because grass is slow-growing and has high water content during cold winter months.
<i>Fertilizer application</i>	Fertilizer is applied to pastures to promote rapid plant growth in spring.
	
SPRING	
<i>Calving & lambing</i>	Forage availability is high for lactating sheep and cows at this time.
<i>Weed Control</i>	Herbicides are used to control undesirable weeds such as yellow star thistle.
<i>Branding</i>	Cattle are branded as proof of ownership and to prevent theft.
<i>Irrigation</i>	Irrigation water is available in some valley pastures.
<i>Move livestock to summer range</i>	Ranchers move livestock to irrigated valley pastures or higher elevation range in late spring.
<i>Weaning</i>	Fall and winter-born calves and lambs are weaned.
<i>Haying</i>	Hay cut from dryland and irrigated pastures is cut and stored for supplemental feeding from summer through winter.
<i>Shearing</i>	Shearing crews arrive in late spring, and wool is marketed during summer.
SUMMER	
<i>Sheep breeding</i>	
<i>Irrigation</i>	Irrigation of valley pastures continues.
FALL	
<i>Calving</i>	Fall calving is common as calves weaned in spring will grow rapidly on the abundant forage.
<i>Fertilizer application</i>	Fertilizer applied at this time is moved into soil by winter rains.
YEAR-ROUND	
<i>Vaccination and de-worming</i>	Vaccinations are given depending on animal's age and need. Animals are de-wormed annually and as needed.
<i>Sale of livestock</i>	Cattle and sheep are sold depending on current market prices and availability of animals to sell.

*For additional information on how and why these operations are carried out, please contact the agencies and organizations, or see the references listed on the back of this leaflet.

Benefits of livestock production

The livestock industry benefits all Lake County residents by:

- controlling brush encroachment and fire danger.
- providing open space and wildlife habitat.
- maintaining healthy watersheds and high water quality.
- providing local specialty products including, cheese, milk, meat and wool.
- contributing about \$4 million to the local economy annually.

Challenges for livestock producers

Economic and regulatory factors have shaped the livestock industry in the past and continue to do so today. Challenges livestock producers face include:

- remaining competitive in a market which is controlled at national and global levels.
- complying with stricter environmental regulations. For example, to comply with federal and state regulations, ranchers are developing plans to reduce water pollution from their operations.

- contending with increased predation from roaming dogs, mountain lions, which are federally protected, and coyotes, for which control funding has been reduced.
- paying for repairs related to trespassing and damage to fences.

County residents who are not involved in ranching can also play a role in the success of the livestock industry in Lake County. For example, it is important to control dogs to prevent livestock injury. Respecting private property, especially by leaving gates closed and reporting damage to fences, can help reduce the costs of livestock escape. Cooperation between ranchers and their nonagricultural neighbors will become increasingly important as the county population is expected to triple in the next forty to fifty years.

New approaches in livestock production

Ranchers have long tried to be good stewards of the land because it is the basis for their livelihood. Today there is increased recognition of the potential for livestock-induced soil erosion and stream damage, which can reduce rangeland productivity and impair water quality. There are many ways in which ranchers are changing their management systems to reduce these impacts:

- **Grazing systems** involve planning the location and size of pastures, and controlling the number of animals and amount of time they spend in individual pastures. With proper design, these systems can prevent overgrazing and soil erosion and encourage growth of desired plant communities.
- **Structural improvements** including fences, roads, ponds, and water troughs, are used to facilitate proper grazing use and control livestock use of streams and other critical areas.
- **Land treatments** such as seeding, tillage, or prescribed burning, can be used to improve vegetation, reduce erosion, and improve wildlife habitat.



Note: New livestock owners in Lake County should contact a local veterinarian to find out about local disease and nutrition issues.

Additional Resources Agencies and Organizations

Cattlemen's Association of Lake County
Contact University of California Cooperative
Extension for current President

Mendocino / Lake Wool Growers
Contact University of California Cooperative
Extension for current President

California Brand Inspector for Lake and Mendocino
Counties (707) 743-1630

Lake County Farm
Bureau
85 Soda Bay Road
Lakeport, CA 95453
(707) 263-0911

Lake County Department
of Agriculture
883 Lakeport Blvd.
Lakeport, CA 95453
(707) 263-0217

University of California
Cooperative Extension
883 Lakeport Blvd.
(707) 263-6838
Lakeport, CA 95453

References

- U. C. Publications Catalogue (many resources), U. C. Cooperative Extension
"Raising Animals" In *Small Farm Handbook*, U. C. Cooperative Extension
Sheep Care Practices and Beef Care Practices, U. C. Cooperative Extension
Rangeland Watershed Program Fact Sheets, U. C. Cooperative Extension
Lake County Factbook, U.C. Cooperative Extension

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Agriculture in Lake County, California

Guide to Livestock Operations



Produced by the Lake County Farmers and Neighbors Planning Committee, dedicated to ensuring continuation of agriculture as part of Lake County's economic and cultural future.