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A Program Called Bootstraps

Cooperative Extension Service
South Dakota State University

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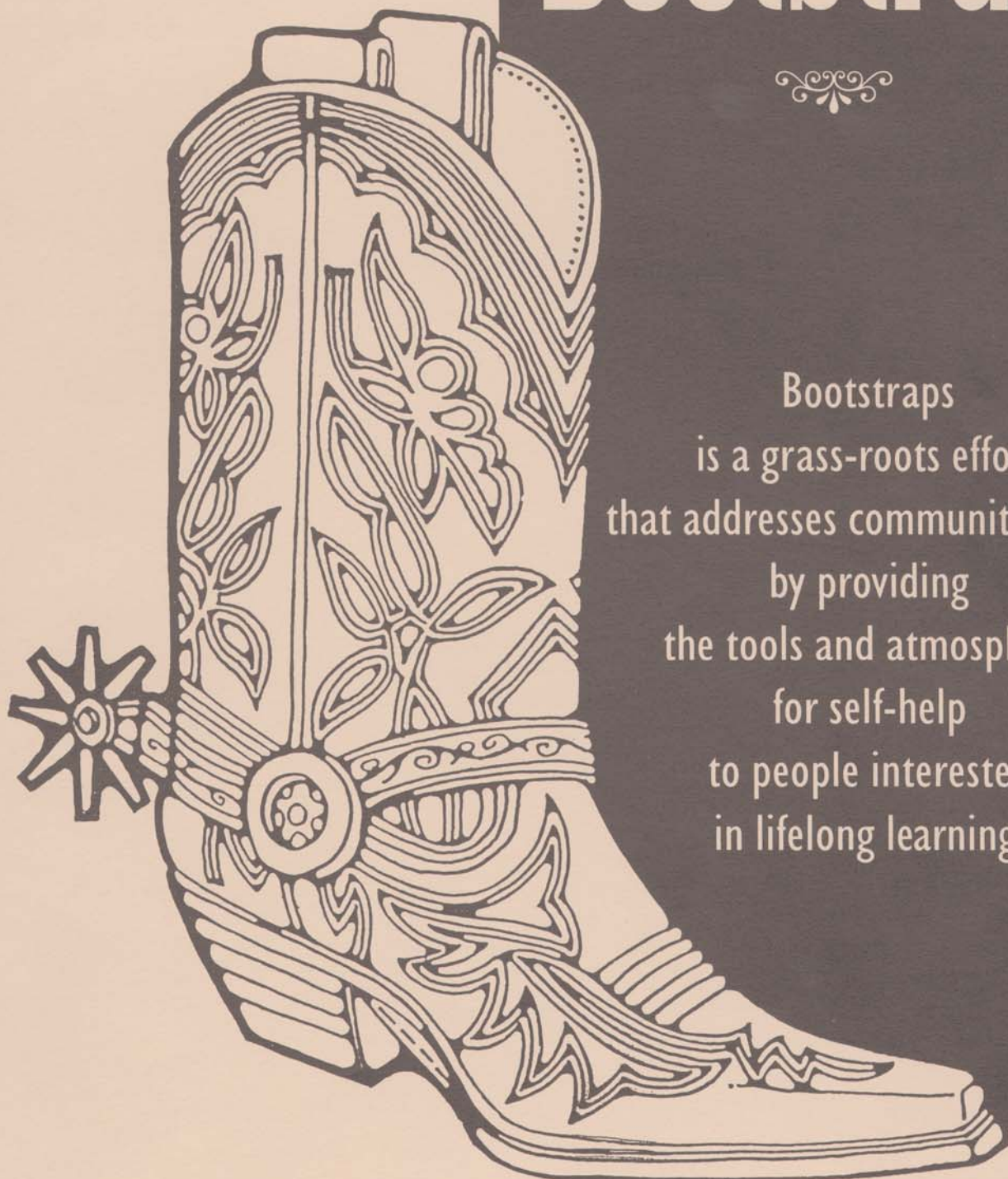
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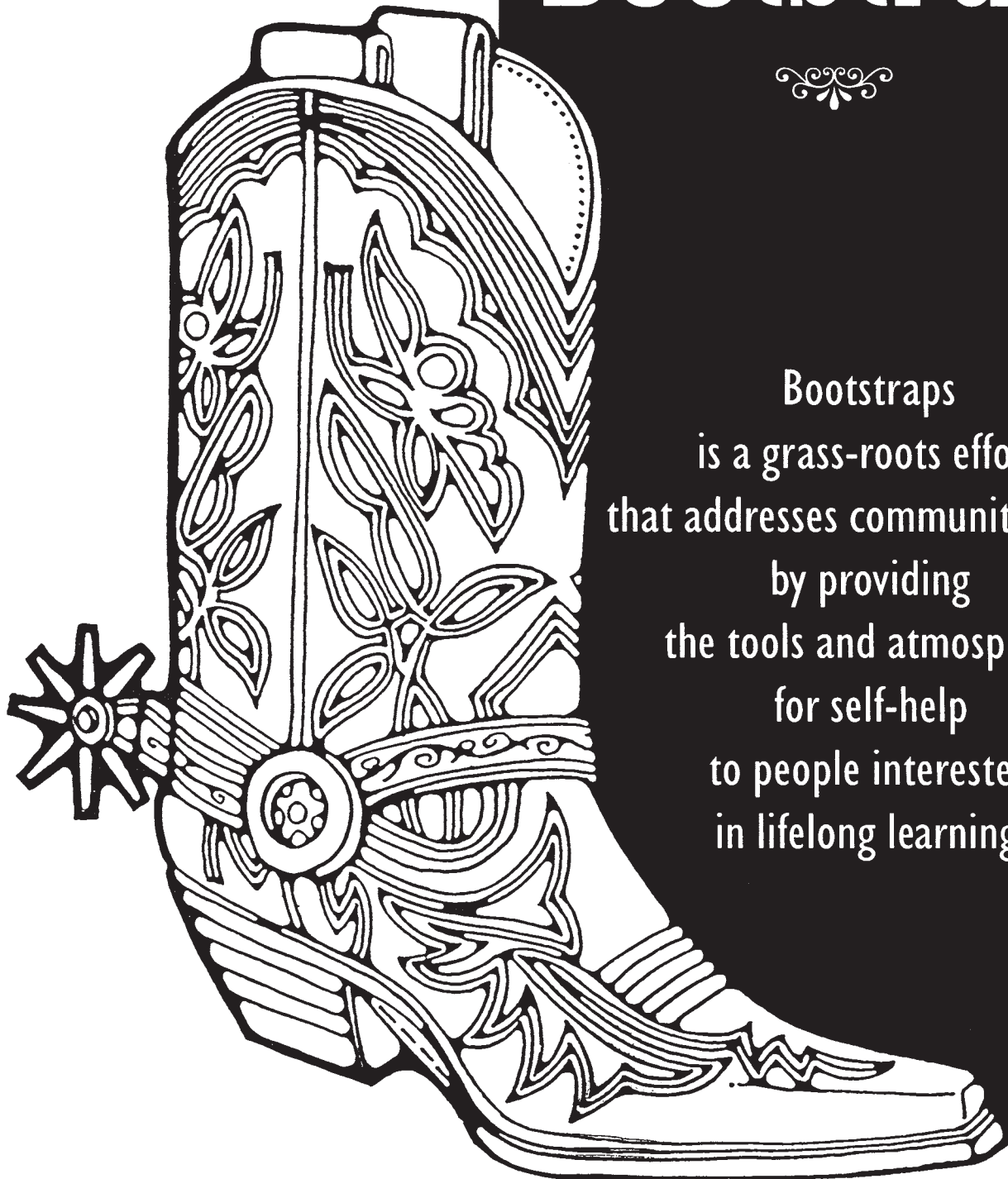
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A program called
Bootstraps

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is a grass-roots effort
that addresses community needs
by providing
the tools and atmosphere
for self-help
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When ranchers, their families, and some interested agencies come together with the right plan to address short- and long-term needs, some good results are sure to follow.

“Bootstraps” is a program that features such a plan. It’s a good example of a grass-roots program that grew out of the innovation and the dedication of community leaders who analyzed the challenges facing not only their profitability, but also their community and their families.

The program began when a group of community leaders from south central South Dakota came together in December, 1988, to develop a plan for addressing those challenges by working together and with a variety of agencies. The idea was to gain the expertise and the management tools to reach each of their goals.

But first, they took an objective look at their situation:

Despite the best intentions of agencies serving South Dakota agriculture, farm and ranch families remained particularly susceptible to the negative effects of drought, low commodity prices, soil erosion, overgrazing, and problems of water quantity and quality.

Causes included:

- Farmers and ranchers often lacked goals beyond their current operating year;
- They often viewed conservation planning only as a way to access federal programs;
- Financial planning specialists from lending institutions didn’t include resource planning in their requirements, so the farmer or rancher ended up with an incomplete list of his assets;
- Some agencies emphasized the quantity of conservation plans instead of the quality;
- Potential purchasers of land did not have an accurate method for determining how much they could afford to pay for it.

The community leaders also decided they had to find a way to assure some kind of continuity in farm/ranch ownership from one generation to the next. That meant that families needed to hold their operations together economically. It meant they had to maintain and improve the quality of their natural resources. And it also showed need for improved communication and planning among family members.

The group decided to find a way to systematically match family needs with the economic and informational resources already available from local, state, and federal agencies.

The group agreed that the basis for any successful farm or ranch operation was its natural resources. And because most of the operations in the area were primarily ranches, they recognized that quality animals and animal products were their most basic commodity.

The group agreed that the most basic economic rule is that no family can remain on the land for long without profit.

And finally, they agreed that none of these efforts could succeed without better family communication and goal setting.

"Bootstraps took my record-keeping efforts out of the shoebox and into the computer."





“Thanks to Bootstraps, I’m now getting more pounds on my cattle in less time and on less acres.”

The heart of the whole effort was to match up the family and their cattle to the land they possessed, and the group decided on a six-step approach to take to achieve this goal:

First, it would be necessary to inventory the financial, livestock, and natural resources of each participating ranch—and the relevant skills of the family members was to be considered as one of those resources; next, each of the families would have to develop their goals and commit them to paper; third, a long-ranged operational plan for each ranch would have to be developed to reflect those family goals; next, skills of family members in areas such as record keeping and communications would need to be strengthened; fifth, a way was needed to monitor each family’s progress and find out what worked and what didn’t; and all this would provide the basis for a final step: to re-plan.

So, all six steps became a continuous process—not a short-term training workshop. And each step involved not only finding and using the right kind of outside help among the various agencies and service organizations,

but also developing an adult education program that would enhance each family's own abilities to make the best use of that help.

Another outcome from that first meeting was a letter drafted by the group to South Dakota Governor George Mickelson explaining the frustrations of the families and detailing what the group would like to do about it. Although the leaders had a pretty clear understanding of what they wanted to accomplish, their basic problem was a lack of funds to move the project ahead.

It was then that one of the local Conservation District supervisors had an idea: grant money was available from the state Conservation Commission, but, instead of using it for a typical conservation project, why not use it to reflect the concerns that the group had indicated to Governor Mickelson earlier?

That idea proved to be a breakthrough. The funds were there all the time, but nobody had ever thought to use them for conserving families rather than planting trees.

"If they don't make a profit, ranches simply won't be there to pass from one generation to the next."



The next task was to contact agricultural agencies and enlist their participation. The kind of participation the families needed wasn't "business as usual," as we said earlier. Despite their best intentions, agencies had sometimes unintentionally been part of the problem instead of part of the solution.

One of the group gave this example: one agency might analyze a sample of your hay and recommend that you buy a protein supplement. Another agency might tell you to replant your alfalfa. The trouble was, maybe you couldn't afford to do either one. Neither of the recommendations had been plugged into your cash flow. So, despite the good intentions, the recommendations merely served to worsen your family's financial situation and further intensify your stress and frustrations.

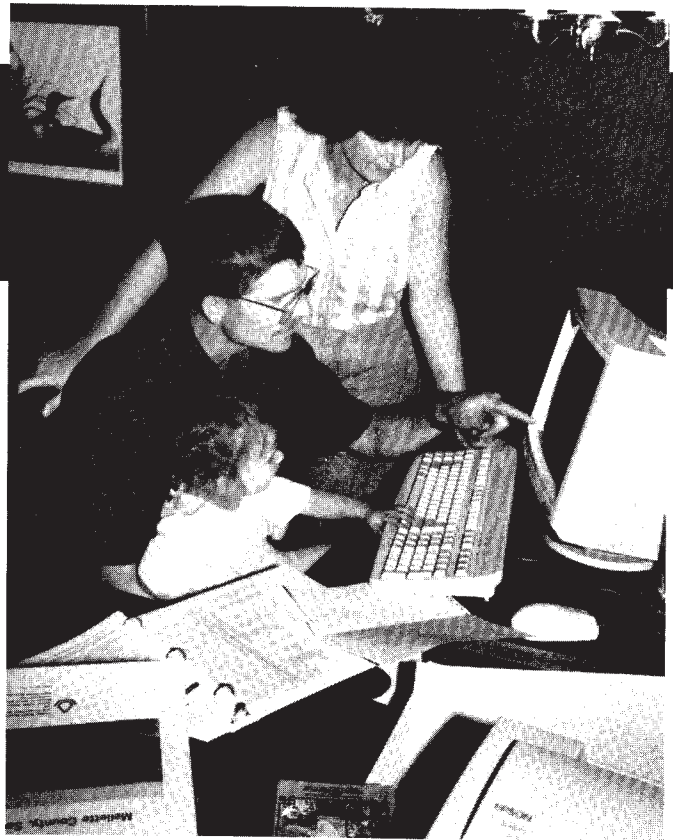
Aside from economic considerations, there also were family considerations. An operator who was being forced to work overly hard to get that last 5% of production—or sometimes even just to stay in business—sometimes lost contact with his wife and children. Stresses like these require stress management, but the problem was that families often were too proud or embarrassed to admit they needed that kind of help. So, this is one example of how families first needed help in order to know how to use the help that already was there for them.

The challenges that lay ahead were big ones, but eventually several agencies besides the Conservation Commission signed on to help, including: the South Dakota State University Cooperative Extension Service, the Todd and Mellette County Conservation Districts, the South Dakota Department of Agriculture, and the Soil Conservation Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The concept was a hard sell in some instances, but it helped that the Bootstraps families said they'd go ahead with the project one way or another. With that kind of momentum, it was easier for agencies to decide they'd rather be on board than off.

Eventually, the number of agencies also grew to include adult farm management specialists, rural mental health providers, the Environmental Protection Agency, the South Dakota Department of Environment and Natural Resources, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

“Bootstraps families used Finpack software to improve all areas of finance and management.”



Getting the job done also required some political sensitivity. One participant explained it's no use wasting time on people who won't work with you.

“We were lucky that the governor appointed the Dean of Agriculture at South Dakota State University, and that he, in turn, asked the Director of Extension to handle it. When that happened, we tapped into a willing and understanding kind of leadership,” he explained.

These agency contacts served to access a host of specialists for the participating families, but the difference this time was that the participants used the specialists in a whole new way.

Another Bootstraps participant said one of the best examples was in natural resource management. *“When we hired a person to do the natural resource inventory work, we required that everything be done to SCS standards and according to their paper work system. So when he got done, we had the paper work done in such a way that we could go to the Soil Conservation Office and have a conversation that was familiar. The agency people appreciated that, and it made for a much more productive use of the investment we'd made in that service.”*

By 1990, Bootstraps was fully underway. The number of participating families had grown to 26. Eventually this number would rise to 56. These families first wrote and prioritized their own goals. Next they wrote plans that responded to those goals. Finally, they rounded up the resources and tools that it took to put those plans into action.

That first winter was spent in adult education workshops which served as a basis for those three activities. The local Extension agent also video-taped these workshops for those couples who might have been unable to attend.

Next came a complete resource inventory for each of the family operations, and this, in turn, served as a basis for subsequent management planning to help each couple address their business, stewardship, and family needs.

“Our overall skills as ranchers, business persons, and family members were vastly improved,” according to one of our group. “But the most interesting outcome was that our families found this type of learning also sets up the desire and the need for learning on a lifelong scale. In that sense, Bootstraps showed us that the joys of life aren’t at the end of the road, but are found along the way.”



“We have to maintain and improve the quality of our natural resources to stay in business.”

Starting Your Own Project

Bootstraps participants volunteered their advice for those who would follow with projects of their own:

How did you get people to turn out?

“We were afraid that just radio spots or news articles wouldn’t be effective, so, in each of our two counties, we formed a team of 5-6 of us who physically went around and asked people to come. It took a one-on-one, ‘over-the-kitchen-table’ kind of visit to fully explain what we were trying to do and what the program could do to help the individual family. Without this, we doubt that we’d have succeeded. These visits also served as a listening session for family problems and concerns, and we used that later in our program planning.”

What kind of agenda did you follow?

“Basically, we had to go with the ones who were interested, but you have to invite all of your resource agencies—and don’t assume they won’t work with you until you’ve given them a chance. We found out you have to expect a lot of cooperation if you want to get a lot of cooperation.”

What agenda did you follow?

“Our first fall and winter was spent in adult education. We had eight evening meetings that first fall and winter and about 17 daytime and evening meetings altogether. We focused on topics that included: Change, Goals, Record Keeping, Conservation, Marketing, Drought, Planning, Monitoring, and Wrap-up. A list of our topics is at the back of this publication.

“That summer, we scheduled our resource inventory, tours, and field trips. That fall, we divided into teams and worked at our Practice Ranch Planning exercise. During the second winter, each family worked at developing their own plans.

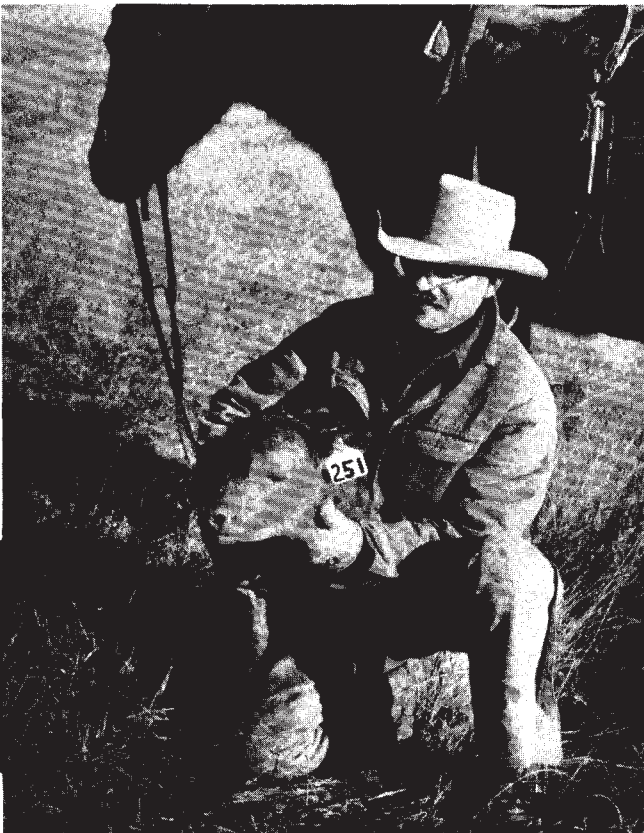
“When the second summer rolled around, we worked at implementation, monitoring, and re-planning.”

**What would you
do differently?**

“Structurally, we wouldn’t change a lot, but we’d demand an even higher level of service from our resource people. You have to tell them that you expect they will give you the best presentation of their life—not to offend them, but to let them know what your expectation is. When you expect better service, you tend to get it.”

**Would you change
anything else?**

“One thing is that the Bootstraps concept doesn’t need a lot of tinkering. Obviously, you have to adapt it somewhat to your local conditions, but if you mess around with it too much, it won’t be successful.”



*“High quality animals and
animal products are our most
basic commodity.”*

**What is it that made
Bootstraps succeed?**

“Very simple. Bootstraps dealt with all aspects of the operation—not just part of them. And it wasn’t a matter of just asking an agency to send someone to look at a single problem and take a potshot at it, because Bootstraps put the final responsibility back on the family to solve their own problems.”

**Looking back, how do
the families feel about it?**

“There are two levels. One is those of us who want to continue to meet as a group, and the other is those who think it was a good experience, but now let’s put it to use and go to work. We don’t hear any negative comments, though.”

**Were there any
interesting spinoffs?**

“For one, we believe we now have increased agency sensitivity to the big picture in ranch management. Another is that an indepth record book we developed for ranchers to use in collecting information has proven out so good that the National Cattlemen’s Association has adopted it and is publishing it.”

**What was the most successful
tool you developed?**

“After we’d gone through all the adult education sessions of that first winter and the ranch resource inventory that followed, we did that practice session on ranch planning. That’s one thing that should not be left out of a program. It was just dumb luck that we stumbled onto this, but we had heard of it being used in classes at the University of Nebraska. They’d present a case study of a ranch, and then the students would develop a plan.

“We presented a similar case study, and all of us were divided up four families to a team to come up with a management plan for this fictitious ranch over the next couple of months. Our teams met about five times during that period before presenting their final plan to the rest of us.



“Bootstraps lets us clearly see what we need to do and where we need to go.”

“We took what we’d already learned about family communication, prairie dog control, beef cattle management, and a lot of these kinds of things, and we applied them.

“We even had our teams go to the ASCS and report their highly erodible land. We had them go through all those steps—not only just getting together and writing the plan, but we even had to get the soil map and work with our conservation district personnel.

“The practice plan provided all the management challenges we get in real life—even to the point of providing us with a fictitious sister married to a doctor in Baltimore.

“This broke down a lot of tradition, and, because it was so real-life, it sure improved communications.

“Each group then presented their plan to the others. It showed us how to work as a team to solve a problem, and there was even a little competition to see which of our teams would develop the best plan. All of us took what we’d learned up to that point and applied that to this ‘pretend’ situation. That made it much easier to make the right management choices than if it actually had been our own place.

“It also helped with self esteem. A son could express things in the planning process that he might not have felt comfortable expressing to his dad, and

“Local people responded to a local situation and received quality help from agencies set up to help us exactly the way that they helped us.”



his dad also then had a chance to gain some new respect for his son's ability to manage.

“Without a doubt, the practice ranch plan probably was the biggest success we had. If you left this out of your program, you'd sacrifice about half of your potential success.”

What are some other results?

“In one case, the parents and the two adult sons of one ranching operation were among those encouraged by Bootstraps to implement some estate planning. As fate would have it, both parents passed away just a year later, and the estate planning saved thousands and thousands of dollars when their assets were transferred. It's possible that the ranch might have had to be broken up and sold if that kind of planning hadn't occurred.

“In another case, a family never had a scale on their ranch and had never performance-tested their herd. Because of Bootstraps, this family now tests, and they've been able to cull enough poor performers that they now have a lot more efficiency and will wean more pounds with fewer cows.

“Another family never even considered owning a computer, but Bootstraps not only gave them access to the training they needed, but it showed them

in a practical way how the proper use of a computer in record-keeping can make the difference between financial solvency and financial ruin. Of our original 26 families, at least half now have computers in their homes.

“And one really interesting thing we noticed is that each of us are continually accessing new resource people from an ever expanding circle. This didn’t exist before Bootstraps. A lot of us used to feel we shouldn’t bother someone like that with our problems. But now we know that usable information is something we need to improve or even maintain our quality of life.”

**How large did
your program get?**

“We finally had 56 families representing 236,000 acres in rural, south central South Dakota and north central Nebraska, and we’re kind of proud of that.”

**What do we need
to get started?**

“Even a small group of ranchers and other interested persons will only need three things: some hard work, a desire to serve your community, and the determination to see it through. If you have questions, any of us will be happy to visit with you.”



*“The joys of life aren’t at the
end of the road, but are found
along the way.”*

**Where do we
get funding?**

“Money is available from a variety of sources for projects like this. The point is, don’t view this as a stumbling block.”

Who can help us?

“Start with the most obvious sources of help: your county agent, your district conservationist, your beef cattle specialist, and folks like that. Once you get started, you’ll easily discover other places to look for additional, more specialized kinds of help.”

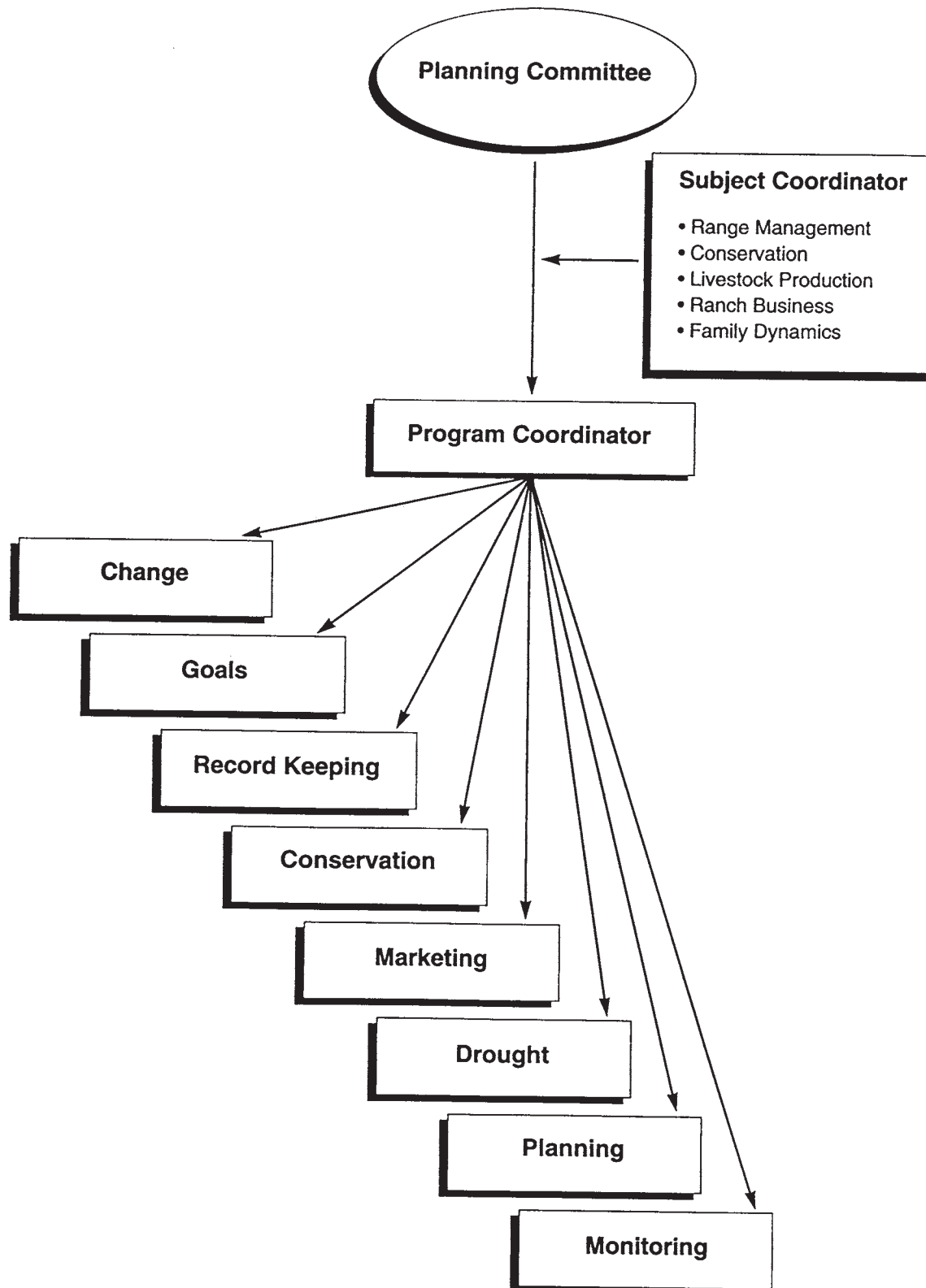
**Want
to know more?**

A 20-minute video also is available at \$10 per copy. To obtain it, enclose a check in that amount and write:

Bootstraps Video
Ag Communications Department
Box 2231
South Dakota State University
Brookings, SD 57007

Appendix

Bootstraps Organizational Structure



Bylaws of the Bootstraps Committee

ARTICLE I - NAME

The name of this group shall be BOOTSTRAPS COMMITTEE.

ARTICLE II - PURPOSE, POWERS, AND OBJECTIVES

Bootstraps is a grassroots effort that addresses community needs by providing the tools and atmosphere for self-help to persons interested in lifelong learning.

ARTICLE III - MEMBERSHIP

Membership of the BOOTSTRAPS COMMITTEE shall be comprised of:

- Two (2) Todd County Conservation District Supervisors,
- Two (2) Mellette County Conservation District Supervisors,
- Soil Conservation Service District Conservationist Adult Farm/Ranch Management Representative
- SDSU Extension Service Agents
- Bureau of Indian Affairs Representative
- Four (4) Interested Members of the Community at Large
- Farmer's Home Administration County Supervisor or Representative

ARTICLE IV - FISCAL YEAR

The fiscal year of this committee shall begin the first day of July and end the last day of June each year.

ARTICLE V - OFFICERS AND DUTIES OF OFFICERS

The officers of BOOTSTRAPS COMMITTEE shall be President, Vice President, and Secretary-Treasurer.

The duties of these officers shall be to carry out the business of the BOOTSTRAPS COMMITTEE based upon general direction supplied by the committee. To do this, it may appoint ad hoc committees and task forces to seek financial assistance to carry out its duties.

The term of office shall be one (1) fiscal year.

Vacancies shall be filled by appointment by the committee until the next annual meeting or whenever a special meeting of the committee is held to fill the vacancy.

ARTICLE VI - QUORUM

A quorum shall consist of members present at any duly announced meeting.

ARTICLE VII - MEETINGS

An annual meeting will be called in June to elect officers and plan the work for the following fiscal year.

The President may call meetings whenever the need arises.

ARTICLE VIII - AMENDMENTS

These bylaws may be amended by a majority vote of the members present at an annual meeting or a special meeting of all members called for the purpose to amend the bylaws or called for any other reason for normal business.

Program Synopsis

Program 1: "Change"

Informational meeting. Ranch couples were invited by advertising and personal invitation, and 26 couples each paid \$50 to enroll.

Connee Quinn - "Challenge of Change"

Donna Brown & Bonnie Metcalf - "Family Communication"

Mike Carson - "Range Vegetation Dynamics"

Jeff Adrian - "Livestock Production"

Brian Jorgensen - "Analysis and the Need for Records"

Dave Steffen - "Conservation Planning"

Program 2: "Goals"

Ralph Matz, Extension Farm Management Specialist, spoke on goal setting. The crowd then broke up into smaller groups. Each was given a topic for some practice goal setting. Topics included range management, conservation planning, livestock production, ranch business and finance, and family dynamics. The objective was to get participants thinking about goals and discover what they expected from Bootstraps.

Program 3: "Record Keeping"

Bonnie Metcalf - "Family and Home Record Keeping"

Terry Goehring - "Cow Herd Record Keeping (CHAPS)"

Dave Steffen - "Conservation Record Keeping"

Brian Jorgensen - "Financial Records"

Ralph Matz - Financial Records"

Program 4: "Conservation"

Dave Schmidt - "Importance of Conservation Plans"

Bonnie Metcalf - "Time Management"

Dave Steffen - "Conservation compliance"

Jeff Adrian - "Finpack Workshop Planning/Information"

Mini-Workshop: "Finpack" - January 21, 1991

Jeff Adrian - "Filling out Finpack forms"

Ralph Matz, Curt Hoyt, Gary Erickson, Gary Nies, and John Kangas then worked individually with the couples on filling out the forms and entering the data.

Program 5: "Marketing"

This meeting featured areas auction barn representatives who were asked to visit with participants about marketing their livestock through the barn rather than just hauling them to the auction the day of the sale.

Burton Pflueger - "Selling Vs. Marketing Your Ag Products"

Bernadine Enevoldsen - "Communication"

Dave Steffen - "Marketing Your Grass"

The following presenters were participants who had been asked to research and report on a specific marketing technique:

Kenny Kingsbury - "Livestock Auction Barns"

Bill Hutchinson - "Video Auctions"

Dan Rasmussen - "Value Added Marketing"

Milton Klein - "Order Buying"

Dwight Logterman - "Retained Ownership"

Homemade ice cream was served in a social setting designed to enable participants to get better acquainted with other couples.

Program 6: "Drought"

Jeff Adrian - "Finpack"

Mike Carson - "Drought"

Jim Johnson - "Drought Management Handbook"

Donna Brown - "Stress Management, Recognizing and Coping"

Program 7: "Planning"

Brian Jorgensen - "Financial Planning"

Val Farmer - "Planning Your Relationships"

Mike Carson - "Pay as You Go Range Resource Planning"

DeWayne Breyer - "Introduction to Summer Range Survey"

Guests from across the state who had been instrumental in helping Bootstraps to get started were invited to a potluck lunch following this meeting.

Program 8: "Monitoring"

Don Boggs - "Calving Distribution and Cow Condition Scoring"

Jeff Adrian - "CHAPS information and handouts"

Ralph Matz and Brian Jorgensen - "Financial Monitoring and Trend Analysis"

DeWayne Breyer - "Plans and Goals for the Summer Range Inventory Survey"

Program 9: "Review of the Planning Process"

Dave Steffen - "Overview of Coming Sessions" - "Review of Ten Steps to Planning" - "Review of the Summer Resource Inventory" - "Transect Photos and Feed and Forage Balance Sheets"

Program 10: "Goal Setting"

David Bryant - "A Problem Is an Opportunity"
Bernadine Enevoldsen - "Family and Ranch Goal Setting"
Jeff Adrian - Explained the "Bar 13 Ranch" practice materials and how group was to use them
Dave Steffen - "Q & A about Resource Inventory"
Mike Carson - "Indian Land Lease and Prairie Dogs"

Program 11: "Introduction to the Computer"

Jeff Adrian and Dave Steffen - "Q & A about Bar 13 Ranch"
Mike Adelaine - "Computer Hardware, Myths and Facts, What to Buy, Needs Vs. Price, Software Needs Vs. Hardware Capacity, Commercial/Shareware/Public-Domain Software"
Ralph Matz - "Where to Get Demos, and the Cheapest Way to Try Out Programs"
Mike Adelaine - "Word Processing, Spread Sheet, and Data Base Demonstrations"

Program 12: "Bar 13 Ranch Reports"

Dave Mousel - "Introduction"
Individual Groups - "Our Plans for the Bar 13"
Ralph Matz - "Intergenerational Communications and Role Play by the Participants"

Programs 13 and 14: "Grazing Lands Applications"

GLA was a land management computer program provided by the Soil Conservation Service. Six, two-part sessions were held with the participants breaking up into small groups and attending two of the sessions. Participants learned the computer model of organizing resource data collected from their ranches. Forage balances based on growth curves provided the animal unit months (AUM's) of forage available in each pasture.

Presenters included: Steve Ekblad, Arnold Mendenhall, Wayne VanderVorst, Dave Buland, Dave Schmidt, Dave Steffen, and Jeff Adrian.

Programs 15 and 16: "Developing a Plan of Operations"

Dave Steffen - "Review of Developing Goals and Objectives for the Ranch"

Wayne VanderVorst - "Various Formats for Plans of Ranch Operations,
Including Livestock, Natural Resources, Finances, and Family"

Jeff Adrian - "Planning Assistance"

Program 17: "Grand Finale"

Certificates of completion were given out at a banquet luncheon. Honored guests included those instrumental in developing and implementing Bootstraps. Evaluations were filled out.

Role of a Bootstraps Subject Coordinator

A subject coordinator should be prepared to advise the Bootstraps committee on how his subject areas should fit into the overall outline of the Bootstraps program. The subject coordinator should then provide information and resources necessary to actively conduct the successful Bootstraps program.

The coordinator should identify potential speakers for presenting the topics selected for Bootstraps sessions. Selected speakers should be contacted, and arrangements made for speaker presentations.

Questions and requests for assistance from the Bootstraps participants should be addressed as they arise during the session. Assistance to individual requests should be provided during Bootstraps sessions or on a one-on-one basis outside of Bootstraps meetings as appropriate. Additional sessions should be arranged as needed to address topics of interest to the group.

Finally, the subject coordinator should advise the Bootstraps committee of needed followup, changes to the program, problems, and any other items of concern that could improve the Bootstraps program.

Role of a Bootstraps Program Coordinator

A program coordinator is the individual responsible for coordinating a session of the Bootstraps program. Duties include:

1. Develop a schedule of activities for the session and provide outline to planning committee.
2. Contact subject coordinators to obtain names of speakers for the topics to be discussed.
3. See that speakers are introduced at the session.
4. Provide support equipment for the speakers.
5. See that refreshments are available if necessary.
6. Keep the planning committee informed of the activities planned for each program.
7. See that date for the next program is announced.

The program coordinator has the primary responsibility to insure that the program follows the intent established by the planning committee. A considerable amount of advanced preparation time is needed by the program coordinator in most cases. The program coordinator must work closely with the subject coordinators to arrange for the best speakers possible.

Resource Persons

(Note: you'll probably develop your own list of resource persons, but you might get some ideas from seeing ours. All our participating ranch families received this list along with the phone numbers for each resource person. As we progressed, our list grew, and each family was constantly on the lookout for new resource persons.)

Mike Adelaine, SDSU Extension Computer Specialist, Brookings

Jeff Adrian, SDSU Todd/Mellette Co. Extension Agent, White River

Don Boggs, SDSU Extension Beef Specialist, Brookings

DeWayne Breyer, Resource Inventory Consultant, Huron

Donna Brown, Southern Plains Mental Health, Winner

David Bryant, SDSU Dean of Agriculture, Brookings

Mike Carson, BIA Range Conservationist, Rosebud

Bernadine Enevoldsen, SDSU Family Financial Management Specialist, Brookings

Gary Erickson, SDSU Brown County Extension Agent, Aberdeen

Val Farmer, Rural Mental Health Consultant, Rapid City

Terry Goehring, SDSU Extension Beef Specialist, Rapid City

Dave Graper, SDSU Horticulture Specialist, Brookings

Curt Hoyt, SDSU Extension Area Farm Management Agent, Rapid City

Jim Johnson, SDSU Extension Range Management Specialist, Rapid City

Brian Jorgensen, Adult Farm/Ranch Business Management, Winner

John Kangas, SDSU Haakon County Extension Agent, Philip

Ralph Matz, SDSU Extension Area Farm Management Agent, Philip

Bonnie Metcalf, SDSU Todd County Extension Agent, Mission

Gary Nies, SDSU Bennett County Extension Agent, Martin

Burton Pflueger, SDSU Extension Farm Financial Management Specialist,
Brookings

Connee Quinn, Elanco Representative, Oelrichs

Dave Schmidt, SCS State Range Conservationist, Huron

Dave Steffen, SCS District Conservationist, White River

Clair Stymiest, SDSU West River Agronomist, Rapid City

Wayne VanderVorst, SCS Area Range Conservationist, Pierre.



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