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Principles of Holistic Resource Management: Investing in Self- Education

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Beef Day 2022

Principles of holistic resource management: Investing in self-education

Pete Bauman

Objective

To introduce agricultural producers to an option for assessing livestock and land stewardship through a Holistic Resource Management and 'Triple Bottom Line' approach to whole farm and ranch planning.

Study Description

First developed as a concept for approaching grazing resources management by Alan Savory in the 1970's as a means of combating poor grazing practices, the concept of Holistic Management has evolved in the modern era to Holistic Resource Management, or in some cases "Wholistic" Resource Management, suggesting a more inclusive approach to overall planning and assessment beyond developing a sustainable grazing plan.

In simplified terms, a complete Holistic Resource Management plan for an agricultural businesses ultimately embraces a core concept that centers on the original 'Triple Bottom Line' accounting philosophy where the three "P's" of profit, people, and planet are all viewed as valuable measures and the advancement of a balanced relationship between these measures leads to successful management of a business as a whole.

There are several iterations of the three "P's" in various business sectors, but all generally reflect the broad categories of measuring sustainability in relation to Social, Environmental, and Economic impact. In the farming and ranching industry, these measures are often re-labeled as finances, resources (land and other assets), and people (often family).

There is, and will continue to be, a great deal of debate over Savory's grazing model. And key to the success of triple bottom line accounting, as explained by the founder of the concept John Elkington, is that it be more than simply a method of accounting. Rather, both are designed to provoke deeper thinking about the entirety of the thing being assessed.

Because of this more open interpretation, the combination of Holistic Resource Management coupled with Triple Bottom Line accounting creates a framework for agricultural producers to walk through a process of recognizing and challenging paradigms, creating vision, setting goals, identifying and engaging key persons, and learning to work with (instead of counter to) natural processes that can lead to greater profitability and resilience.

Take Home Points

Agricultural producers who have embraced the concepts of Holistic Resource Management planning utilizing a Triple Bottom Line approach to accounting and accountability have often, and at times drastically, changed their operational structure and business models. Some changes that are often cited as drivers of improving profitability are:

- Recognizing and matching livestock with the local environment
- Syncing management with natural cycles
- Identifying and controlling unnecessary input expenses



- Improving understanding of profitability related to biological diversity
- Understanding indicators of systems health and profitability

In addition, increased success and resiliency of the business, including improved lifestyle and mental health, decreased overhead, improved profitability, happiness, and opportunity to transition the business to future generations are often cited as key outcomes of a Holistic Resource Management approach.

Producers interested in learning more about the Holistic approach to management of resources can find opportunities and resources through the SD Grassland Coalition, SD Soil Health Coalition, SDSU Extension, and other's annual educational events including.

- Pasture walks
- SD Grazing Schools
- SD Grassland Management School
- SD Soil Health School
- Holistic Resources Management Schools
- Ranching For Profit Schools
- Low Stress Livestock handling workshops
- Other workshops and events

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