

Ranching *into the* Future

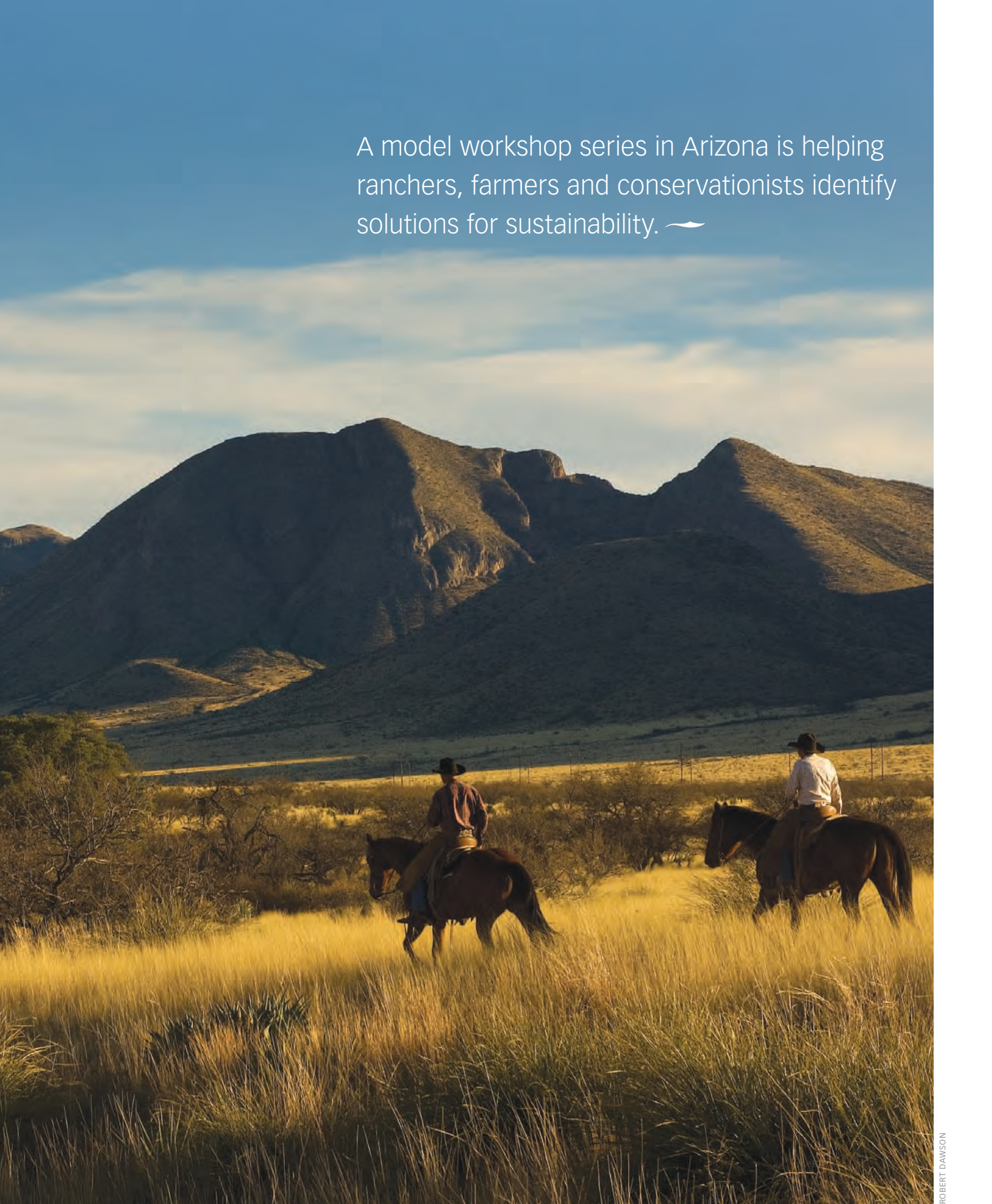


Ranching and farming throughout the country are essential to maintaining local and regional agricultural economies and preserving rural heritage and culture. For generations, ranchers and farmers have been some of the best land stewards around, and their working landscapes can help sustain plant and wildlife habitat. However, with costs of running a sustainable operation on the rise, and urban encroachment and exurban development reducing open space throughout the West, Arizona, among other states, is losing its ranchland and farmland at an alarming rate. Recognizing that existing ranches and farms provide a variety of community benefits that also include clean air, water and iconic western views, Arizona Land and Water Trust (ALWT) has embarked on a mission to help Arizona ranchers identify and implement strategies that can help them stay on the land and maintain their operations.

continued on page 22



A model workshop series in Arizona is helping ranchers, farmers and conservationists identify solutions for sustainability. —



ROBERT DAWSON



Dennis Moroney of the 47 Ranch in McNeal, Arizona, describes his use of solar panels during a “Renewable Energy Options for Ranches and Farms” workshop, part of the *Ranching into the Future* series.

ALWT’s land and water program manager, and Executive Director Diana Freshwater got the idea for the *Ranching into the Future* series after conversations with Barron Orr and Lay Gibson from the University of Arizona’s Office of Arid Lands. Orr, an associate professor and extension

specialist and Gibson, the director of the Economic Development Research Program, both recommended that ALWT partner with the university’s local extension offices in Cochise and Santa Cruz counties to get some workshops going.

Rancher and Tucson architect John Riggs was another strong proponent of the extension partnership. Descended from a long line of Cochise County ranchers, Riggs’ most recent experience with cooperative extension includes working with agent Mark Apel to form a Rural Planning Area (RPA) for Cochise County, the direct result of a workshop that focused on planning and zoning options for working landscapes. Authorized under state law, RPAs are one of the tools available to help sustain working landscapes. They allow rural landowners to become part of the county planning and permitting process.

ALWT is part of a growing trend of land trusts in America to join forces with a traditional education partner as a means of first understanding landowners’ needs and then building trusting relationships with those landowners. ALWT knew it might initially be viewed as an outsider in some ranching and farming communities and recognized the strength in having a partner that landowners already knew and trusted. As that partner, Arizona Cooperative Extension has become an important bridge to conserving ranchlands in the Grand Canyon State.

Arizona Cooperative Extension proved to be a receptive partner, and one that brought formidable strengths to the table. In 2009 alone, 102 faculty, 170 staff, and 9,000+ volunteers served more than 300,000 Arizonans, from 4H youth and beyond.

Nationwide, cooperative extension services have unprecedented reach—with offices in every state and territory, in or near most of the nation’s approximately 3,000 counties, according to the USDA. Cooperative extension offices are staffed by one or more experts who provide research-based information to agricultural producers, small business owners, youth, consumers and others in rural areas and communities of all sizes.

By co-presenting *Ranching into the Future* workshops with the Arizona Cooperative Extension on a diverse range of subjects of interest to ranchers, ALWT has quickly become known as a valuable and trusted resource to ranchers and farmers with one primary goal in common: to keep working landscapes alive in Arizona. “The partnership we have with the extension service is vital to the success of the workshops” says Liz Petterson. “Their knowledge of the challenges these communities are facing, from maintaining ranching operations to managing invasive grasses, helps our organization better understand and identify areas where we can be helpful.”

Workshops That Work

Ranching into the Future workshops cover a wide variety of topics, from land protection options to grant funding opportunities. Other subjects include estate planning for working landscapes, collaborative ranching efforts, planning and zoning alternatives, product marketing and increasing visibility in the local foods market, and food safety considerations. The most recent workshop entitled “Renewable Energy Options for Ranches and Farms” was attended by over 50 participants. Workshop presenters have



Here, Dennis Moroney explains the use of a solar inverter during the workshop.

continued from page 19

In the fall of 2007, ALWT forged an enduring partnership with the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension to help Arizona ranchers make educated choices about the future—their own and that of their land. Twelve *Ranching into the Future* workshops completed to date are already yielding success on many levels. The series is not only helping to keep ranching alive in Arizona, it is also opening new doors to conservation practices and partnerships among stakeholders on a grassroots level, and could become a model for other western states to follow.

Finding the Right Partner

When planning educational outreach, it makes sense to pool resources with existing organizations that have established community ties. In this case, Liz Petterson,



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ranged from CPA’s to veterinarians, but ranchers themselves often take the lead, sharing ideas and experiences that may help their neighbors.

Susan Pater, director of the Arizona Cooperative Extension in Cochise County, explains how cooperative extension, ALWT and other key stakeholders initiated the series there through planning meetings. “We brainstormed various topics that landowners had expressed interest in learning more about. Then we prioritized those topics that we thought would have the most interest and for which we could identify presenters. After the first workshops, we also asked participants what topics they would like to learn more about,” Pater explained.

Invitations were mailed to lists provided by ALWT and extension, as well as Cochise County Farm Bureau, Cochise-Graham Cattlegrowers, Coronado Resource Conservation and Development, and local Natural Resource Conservation District organizations. These efforts yielded a good response with average attendance of 30 participants for each of the first 12 workshops. “Considering that just one rancher participant may control thousands of acres, even minimal participation can have a big impact,” says Petterson.

On post-workshop surveys, all participants to date, without exception, have stated they will implement at least one idea they learned at the workshop, whether it be installing spring-loaded valves, making a conservation plan or applying for grants to start a grass-fed beef operation, to name a few.

One of the most popular workshops has been “Estate Planning for Working Landscapes.” For many ranching and farming families, passing their land on to heirs and/or permanently protecting their land from encroaching development is a lifelong goal. Estate planning is critical in achieving these goals, and this workshop was designed to cover the many options that are available

to protect family land. Tax and legal advice at the workshops includes tax strategy, managing estate tax, federal tax benefits and incentives, donating land by will, charitable remainder trusts, gifts of remainder interests, family limited partnerships, limited liability companies, and much more.

According to estate planner/presenter Britt Simmons (CPA/PFS, CFP, AEP), managing partner of the Tucson accounting firm Regier, Carr and Monroe, ranchers are naturally interested in financing and succession issues. Ranchers tend to have a lot of value sitting in real estate, but a ranching operation usually doesn’t produce enough cash to support all of the family members. Old ranching families tend to have multiple family members who may or may not want to participate in future ranching efforts. There is often pressure to sell off the land to developers. The *Ranching into the Future* series presents a full range of options, including estate planning options that allow for liquidation of assets while permitting ongoing cattle operations.

“We often have repeat participants at this workshop because the concepts we’re presenting are complicated,” Simmons said. “Ranchers living remotely do not tend to have a lot of exposure to information concerning the formation of estates, trusts and family limited partnerships. In fact, these are techniques most ranchers have never heard of. I’ve been pleasantly surprised by the number and variety of questions they ask at the workshops. You can tell the questions are family-specific or geography-specific.”

Results, Both Measurable and Exponential

Doc Clyne, a second-generation Sonoita, Arizona rancher, considered his options carefully before ultimately deciding to sell a majority of his family ranch to Pima County. The land was purchased using voter-approved funds from conservation

bonds. Through this program, ranching families continue to live on and manage their ranches.

The option to be able to stay on the land was very important to Clyne, whose family has been in the cattle business about 60 years. With up to 175 head of cattle, Clyne considers ranching to be “a lifestyle, not an economic unit.” Conversations with folks at ALWT helped Clyne realize that his ranch was a strategic land bridge needed to tie together various existing conservation zones.

“We had the water, the zoning, the views and the beauty...a developer’s dream,” Clyne said, “but our main goal was to be able to stay there. I kept my development options open while we pursued the path to conservation, because I wasn’t sure it would come to pass. I went so far as to do market research and evaluation of the development project.”

“By selling to Pima County for conservation, we achieved our goal to stay on the land and ultimately prevented future growth,” Clyne said. Now, he says he looks forward to starting an experimental project this spring, in which he will apply methods he learned at one of the workshops about marketing grass-fed beef.

This is merely a snapshot of the progress that has only just begun. ALWT is continuing its work in hopes of replicating similar success stories—one ranch at a time—to produce big-picture results for Arizona. According to Pater, a key benefit expressed by participants is the networking that has taken place between the ranchers and the various expert presenters. The sharing of tools, techniques and ideas during the workshops has been beneficial in helping all parties see new opportunities for sustainability beyond what has traditionally been done.

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