

## Traditional ranching heritage and cultural continuity in the southwestern United States

Carol Raish , Alice M . McSweeney

USDA Forest Service , Rocky Mountain Research Station , 333 Broadway SE , Ste . 115 , Albuquerque , NM , USA

E-mail : craish@fs .fed .us

**Key words** : tradition ,ranching heritage ,culture ,grazing allotments ,permittee ranchers

**Introduction** This study , conducted among ranchers on the Santa Fe and Carson National Forests in the Southwestern United States , examines the role of ranching in maintaining traditional heritage and cultural continuity . The mainly Hispanic ranching families of northern New Mexico first came into the region in 1598 with Spanish colonization . Many of the villages received community land grants from the King of Spain and later from the Mexican government . After US acquisition in 1848 , many communities lost communal range and woodlands from their land grants . Much of the lost grant land eventually came under federal management . Descendants of grantees are now livestock permittees on national forests , with much smaller holdings encompassing remaining house lots and gardens . Some communities are almost completely surrounded by public land with no other grazing areas for the animals ( Eastman et al . 2000 ) .

**Materials and methods** The project began with our attendance at grazing allotment meetings to develop rapport with the ranchers on the ranger districts of the two forests . No sampling methods were necessary because all permittees were offered the opportunity to participate in the study . The 350 permittee ranchers , who participated in the project , reside throughout northern New Mexico and southern Colorado . We conducted interviews using a personally administered questionnaire at a location of the respondent's choosing . In addition to gathering demographic information from the ranchers , we asked them to discuss the ways in which they use land , livestock , and ranching to teach their children heritage , tradition , culture , and values . Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS descriptive statistics ; qualitative data were analyzed using theme groupings and key words .

**Results** Our study demonstrates the importance of ranching to family and community . Many have resisted more lucrative work that would take them away from the ranch . They have selected careers such as teaching , health care , and work with the USDA Forest Service , which allow them to remain in the community and maintain the livestock operation . Being born and raised with land and livestock , they develop a relation to it , not for profit but for satisfaction and enjoyment . Ranching contributes to the top family goals of maintaining quality of life and traditional values ( Figure 1 ) . They tell us that time spent in ranching provides the children with an opportunity to experience the way of life that is their heritage and strengthens family ties ( Raish and McSweeney , 2003 ) .

**Conclusions** The strong feelings the ranchers have toward land and animals cause them great concern over the loss of open land for agriculture , wildlife , and other resources ( Figure 2 ) . . . . " We value the land , the water , the way of life , and will not sell it for economics and material blessings . " The land we have has been in our family for five generations . These properties are more than just dirt . It is part of my family , just like a child and grandchild . The livestock we raise is to maintain our simple life and to teach each generation to love the land as our ancestors did . " Our work with ranchers is designed to assist land managers in interacting with local communities . It is also used to help the general public appreciate the importance of the ranching and farming way of life .

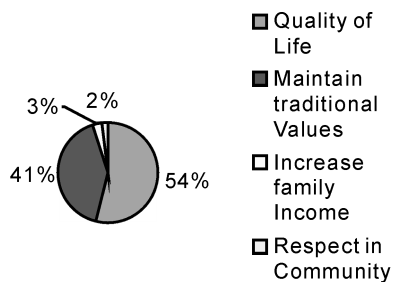


Figure 1 Family goals .



Figure 2 Feeding on the mesa .

### References

- Eastman , C . , Raish , C . & McSweeney , A . M . 2000 . Small livestock operations in northern New Mexico . In : Jemison , R . & Raish , C . Livestock Management in the American Southwest . Amsterdam , The Netherlands : Elsevier Science .
- Raish , C . & McSweeney , A . M . 2003 . Economic , social , and cultural aspects of livestock ranching on the Española and Canjilon Ranger Districts of the Santa Fe and Carson National Forests . RMRS-GTR-113 . Fort Collins , CO , USA : USDA Forest Service , Rocky Mountain Research Station .