

Area farmers learn to stay in business

Classes provide ag operators innovative business pointers

By Michael Lovell
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SODA SPRINGS — With a small but growing cattle ranch of 22 head of mother cows, 19 yearlings and \$50,000 in outstanding loans, Frank and Carla Archer of Bancroft thought a series of classes would be the best way to make a serious go of their business.

"We've got to keep it," Archer said. "Hopefully, this will show us how to maintain and operate our place."

The Archers are among more than 15 area farmers and ranchers attending a three week series of farming classes sponsored by the University of Idaho's agricultural extension offices.

The Western Integrated Resource Education classes, now in their second year, teach farmers how to make the best out of what they have and to plan for the future. The classes began Monday in Soda Springs and run on Monday and Tuesday afternoons for the next three weeks.

The Archers moved to their 160-acre ranch in Southeast Idaho from Montana after Archer left a job with the railroad. The family had always been close to the land and decided to try ranching.

Because the ranch isn't big enough to support their family,



Journal photo by Michael Lovell

From left, Franklin County Agricultural Extension Agent Stuart Parkinson, Franklin farmer Jerry Hawkes and Preston farmer Clifford Jensen participate in Monday's Western Integrated Education classes in Soda Springs.

the two work full time and manage the ranch in their spare time. But the market has been a tough teacher in the four years since the couple began.

Slumping cattle prices have forced them to spend a large share of their salaries on keeping the ranch going.

"It takes both our wages just to make it go," Archer said. "We got in at the wrong time. Cattle have dropped down to nothing. Hopefully, these classes will teach us to plan a little better."

The classes come as agriculture suffers one of the worst economic pinches in decades. Slumping foreign demand and domestic overproduction have led to lower commodities prices and pose a significant threat to local farmers.

One goal of the classes is to look ahead and plan for the future, University of Idaho Agricultural Extension Agent Reed Findlay said.

"We're trying to teach farmers to be business managers," Find-

lay said. "For whatever reason, I don't think the people who work on farms look at them as a business. We can't afford that anymore."

Bear Lake County Agricultural Extension Agent Joel Packham said farming is often viewed as a lifestyle, hurting farmers under extreme conditions.

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