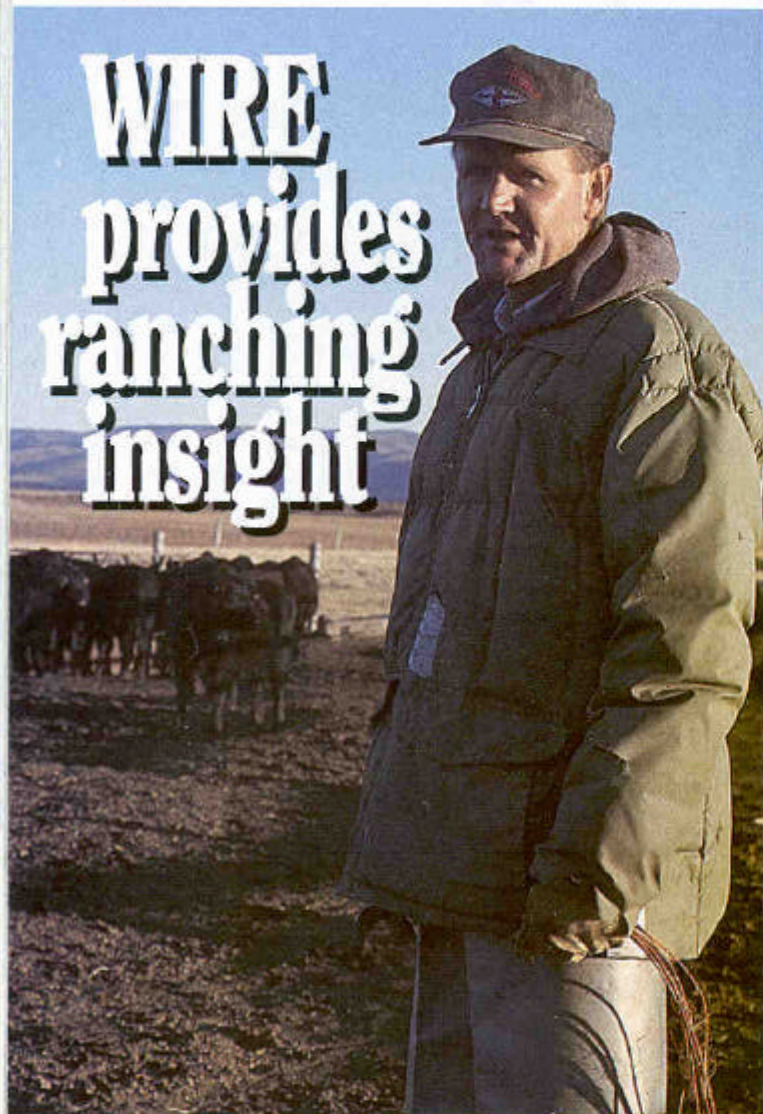


# WIRE provides ranching insight



**I**n the West, ranchers are getting help from a new kind of wire.

Actually, it's not wire—it's WIRE: Western Integrated Resource Education. WIRE training is based on a program that began in Texas. "A group of extension personnel from Wyoming went to Texas to learn it, and then changed the program to fit Wyoming," says Joel Paekham, an extension educator in Bear Lake County, Idaho. "Then we adapted it from Wyoming." Now a regional committee across four states—Wyoming, Idaho, Utah and Montana—presents the program to ranchers and farmers.

Todd Holbrook first heard about WIRE three years ago, through his own extension agents. "I've always been closely associated with extension people," Mr. Holbrook says. "I want to learn from what they know." The WIRE program seemed especially interesting to Mr. Holbrook, who runs a commercial purebred operation in Bancroft, Idaho, because it promised to address issues that are ever-present for anyone working in agriculture. "We all struggle to utilize the resources that we

have and to be efficient," he says.

The aim of the WIRE process is to teach ranchers not only to be more efficient, but to really look at their whole operation in a new light. "We're trying to get them to stop being producers and start being managers," explains Mr. Paekham. "We give them the tools. We give them a lot of hands-on experience."

For example, a full day of class is devoted to goal-setting. "Many people just work from year to year," Mr. Paekham says. "But once they figure out what they really want to accomplish, some people have decided to change their operations totally." Once goals are set, participants figure what reaching each goal will cost and what it will require in terms of other resources. Flow charts help to show on paper how things will actually work throughout the year.

Another major emphasis of the WIRE process is analyzing resources—those include categories such as environmental, livestock and human (banker, extension agents, family, hired people). Personality tests reveal what type of person the manager is and how he or she meshes with other personalities, including spouses and other partners, who are encouraged to attend the class too. "That has been probably the most enjoyed part of the program," Mr. Paekham says.

Some time is spent on financial resources, but Mr. Paekham points out that this is not an accounting course, since there are plenty of those out there already, and finances are

not the only part of the business people must learn to manage. Participants do evaluate each enterprise in which they're involved in terms of its profitability; in Mr. Holbrook's case, that meant cattle, hay and barley. "I may feed the hay to the cattle, but I have to put a dollar figure on it," he says. The evaluation helps a manager to determine his best enterprise mix, and to ask and answer questions such as: Do I need to bring in a band of sheep to better use the forage? Should I quit farming?

Hands-on experience takes place on field trips. Among other things, participants look at grass plots and calculate pounds of grass/acre; they analyze hay, learn about soil types, and perfect their knowledge of body condition scores.

Since taking the course the first time, Mr. Holbrook has made changes at home. Over the years, he had been trying to increase his weaning weights and had begun getting larger cows. WIRE helped him see that he was becoming inefficient. "I've backed off on frame size," he says. "My weaning weights have come down some, but I think my net profit is more." He also delayed calving time to reduce winter feed costs and save more calves. "I was leaning that way before the class, but the class pointed that out for me."

Mr. Holbrook intends to attend the class next year for the third time, to refresh and learn more. "It has helped me prioritize my time, bring efficiency to my cow herd, even helped my marriage," he says. "I recommend this wholeheartedly."

*By Suzanne B. Bopp*

## REAL LIFE MANAGEMENT

**Owner:**  
Todd Holbrook  
**Location:**  
Bancroft, Idaho  
**Operation:**  
Commercial cow-calf