Center for Grassland Studies Alumni Update

Keith Harmoney
Range Scientist, Kansas State University
State Agricultural Research Center-Hays

Keith Harmoney cherished his rural upbringing north of Kearney, NE. The small farm where he grew up consisted mainly of row crops and some alfalfa, but also had some range and pasture land for their small cattle herd. The many hours spent outside working the fields, tending animals, and walking pastures were valuable encounters for his later career path.

His childhood education started in a now-closed country school and was completed in nearby Kearney. From there, he went on to the Ag Honors program at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL), where he focused on range, pasture, and animal production classes, much like the current Grazing Livestock Systems major before it was implemented.

Midway through his time at UNL, Keith joined the Range Club and enjoyed the many hours of study that were needed for competing in the Range Plant Identification contest and Undergraduate Range Management Exam (URME) at the international Society for Range Management meetings. In 1994 in Colorado Springs, the Range Club URME team managed a top 5 finish and Keith won the award for the highest individual combined plant ID and URME score. But, his most fond memories were of the time spent in the herbarium with fellow Range Club members and excursions to field sites and the research center at Mead to help graduate students with research projects. He was greatly influenced by putting the topics of range plants and management together in a class that traveled to actual Sandhills ranches and critically evaluated them for production, sustainability, and potential improvements.

Together, all these experiences at UNL allowed him to realize that the study, analysis and critical thinking of research were something that he liked to do, and that he just may be able to do research as a career in a field he especially enjoyed, range and pasture.

After graduating from UNL, he immediately pursued a graduate degree from Iowa State University in which his research projects and coursework incorporated forages with ecology. That topic combination was inspired by his appreciation of the complexity of rangelands gained from his studies at UNL.

Keith is now a Professor of Range Science for Kansas State University (KSU), and has been stationed at the KSU Agricultural Research Center in Hays, KS since 1999. At KSU, he oversees the use of nearly 6,000 acres of western Kansas rangeland at four locations, and, along with the (continued on back)

Keith Harmoney (continued)

Research Center's beef scientist, manages 325 cow/calf pairs, 100 replacement females, and varying numbers of stocker steers for use in grazing studies. While at KSU, he has conducted trials on different stocking systems for beef cow/calf production or stocker calf production, and how these different stocking systems have affected land productivity and rangeland resources of their research units.

During his career, he's had many research interests, including several grazing studies, complementary forage evaluations, biofuel production, suppression or control of weedy species such as honey locust and old world bluestems, and even the breaking strength of stems of different grass species. The techniques learned in his rangeland analysis class and field lab at UNL nearly 25 years ago have been some of the most used tools and skills still implemented today in his research in Kansas.

Keith is married to Andrea, and they have two children, ages 11 and 14. When not working on research projects, he and his wife are constantly following their kids to church, sports, and school events. Otherwise, he spends as much time as he can at the nearest fishing hole chasing largemouth and smallmouth bass, and still tries to identify any plant he comes across in his daily excursions.