

The world of pastoralism. Herding systems in comparative perspective

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This volume of 13 papers explores various social organizational approaches to managing the world's rangelands and their livestock resources. As such, it is more about sociology than technicality, and this, for me, is the book's interest and strength.

Reading this book has reinforced my belief that our knowledge of the social component of Australian rangelands is dangerously minimal. 'Minimal' because there is very little information available on sociological aspects: family structure, sources of information, evaluation of information by graziers, nature of decisions, support systems, and so on. 'Dangerously minimal' because it is these aspects which determine land use and management of our rangelands. It is not the decisions or views of land administrators, researchers or extension officers. It is the family unit operating the family property. Yet we do not understand the motives or functioning of this unit. This seems to be a curious and quite critical lack that should be addressed.

All rangeland professionals should at least glance at this book, I would be surprised if they could not find one chapter of interest. The Introduction (Pastoral systems in global perspectives) by Galaty and Johnson provides an international perspective and a conceptual framework of livestock production throughout the world. Some startling non-trivia: Australia has the world's highest ratio of cattle to *agricultural* population (26.3 head/person) and the second highest ratio of sheep (180.3 head/person). Only New Zealand has a higher sheep ratio (208), but the next closest nation (Uruguay) manages only 58.8 sheep/person. This certainly vindicates the oft-quoted efficiency of our industry. Figure 1.2 is a fascinating summary of intensity (cattle/agricultural population) and density (cattle/ha) into four animal production systems (ranching, pastoralism, dairying and mixed farming). Australia is the extreme in the ranching category.

Chapter 3 (Nomads, ranchers, and the State: the sociological aspects of pastoralism) provides a slightly narrower view with relevance to Australia. However, there is not real discussion of Australia although Gilles and Gefu assert that "the ranches of the Americas and Australia are the model of livestock production that appears to be an ideal type for livestock development planners" (p. 109). This seems to be a case of distant fields appearing greenest, particularly when only one Australian reference is cited! The chapter provides several points that we can all recognize: 'The rancher does not appear to be motivated by economic concerns' (p. 111); and '... some may argue that overgrazing occurs when animals significantly alter the composition of vegetation even if average production of livestock is not altered; others, including most ranchers, would not accept this definition' (p. 116).

The remaining 12 chapters are localized studies of different nomadic groups, but with little direct relevance to Australia. For example, the families of camel herding Rwala Bedou of northern Arabia have similar economic problems to ours, but have quite different social approaches to them (Chapter 6). Relevance is relative, and in Chapter 11 (High altitude camelid pastoralism of the Andes) Bowman describes approaches to risk management in the high Andes of Bolivia and Chile. Given some Australian interest in alpacas as a new industry, this chapter could be a good starting point for a budding entrepreneur.

The photos are not cited in the text and thus they appear to be visual punctuation rather than a serious attempt to impart information. One or two of the maps are not very clear, and I found one spelling error. These are trivial complaints for a book that is attractively set out and very well produced.

Strongly recommended to those interested in the neglected social aspects of rangelands; and essential as a source book in institution libraries.

The book is available from DA Books, 648 White Cross Road, Mitcham, Vic. 3132. Retail price is \$95.25.

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