From the desk of Nick Ashcroft………

New Extension Range Specialist

As many of you know, I became the new Extension Range Specialist during the first week of April. One of my first projects, assisting Dr. Allison with a poisonous plants publication, looks very promising following our wet winter and provides me with an excellent opportunity to work and learn from a respected and knowledgeable New Mexico rangeland professional. It will also allow me a chance to meet and renew acquaintances with many agents, specialists, and producers throughout the state. In fact, it is my intent to visit every county office in my first year and visit with each agent about local issues as well as opportunities to provide meaningful programs important to their communities. I firmly believe that the local expertise regarding range issues lies with the County Agent and ranchers themselves; my job as a Specialist is to bring different perspectives and results of research conducted to help them improve their expertise.

A little about myself — I was born and raised in New Mexico and the last eighteen years of my life have been at New Mexico State University. Agriculture has always been a part of my life and my experience ranges from working on ranches in the private sector to serving the people of New Mexico through the Cooperative Extension Service. My Doctoral research involved thinning piñon and juniper along natural gas lines in northwestern New Mexico. We took a multidisciplinary approach to the piñon-juniper encroachment and oil and gas development problems and included examinations of hydrology, vegetation, wildlife, and socio-economics. The objective was to scientifically test whether construction of a natural gas pipeline could, with planning, create benefits to multiple interests (i.e., watersheds, wildlife, vegetation, and people) in a highly disturbed landscape. I like to approach things from a “big picture” perspective and that is how I intend to approach my new duties with this position.

The tradition of the Extension Range Specialist position has been that youth programs (4-H and FFA), poisonous plants, range monitoring, and conflict resolution between agencies and producers were important programs for the rangeland managers of New Mexico. I agree with these and intend to continue or expand each of these programs, which were handled for many years by Dr. Chris Allison and ably carried on for the last several by Dr. Sam Smallidge. I am fortunate that I have the opportunity to work with both of these professionals in my new position. It is a priority of mine to include the input from the grassroots expertise to expand, adjust, or modify these programs to fit the different clientele and emerging demands throughout the state. New programs that my experience can add to the program lineup include piñon-juniper woodland management, range management in oil and gas development areas, National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Endangered Species Act (ESA) effects on rangelands and their management. Input, comments, and ideas are always welcomed from everyone and at anytime, please let me know how I can best serve the people of New Mexico. This is an excellent opportunity, which I am excited about, to work and learn from the experiences and expertise of those in Extension and the people they serve. Hope to visit with all of you soon. My ext (575)646-5394 or email me at nashcrof@nmsue.edu.