

# Working Together

## Paths to the perseverance of ranching

by Beverly Sparrowk, Clements, member of the California CattleWomen, Inc.

I don't know about you, but I am getting pretty tired of contentious politics and politicians. I am old enough to remember when there was some cooperation between members of opposing political parties in both Sacramento and Washington, D. C.

My husband **Jack Sparrowk** recently attended a memorial service for a gentleman who, for many years, served as our state assemblyman. One of the comments made most often in the speeches and in conversation about him was that he was a great representative because he knew how to get along with his peers, knew what his constituency needed and wanted and knew when to compromise and forge alliances. Unfortunately, we don't see much of those talents in politics these days.

Although few instances of this type of partnership can be found in houses of the legislature, there is one example of which cattlemen and cattlemen can be very proud of – the California Rangeland Conservation Coalition. This group is a collection of agricultural organizations, environmental interest groups and state and federal agencies that have signed on to the California Rangeland Resolution and, according to their Web site, “have pledged to work together to preserve and enhance California's rangeland for species of special concern, while supporting the long-term viability of the ranching industry.”

This groundbreaking alliance was made possible because people with differing and sometimes opposing views were able to sit down together and actually communicate in a civil and non-contentious manner about a subject that is important to all.

I remember the “them” against “us” days of not-so-long ago when there was no middle ground and those of us in the cattle industry felt as though we were misunderstood and constantly under attack. The California Cattlemen's Association, the California CattleWomen, Inc., and the California Beef Council determined that the best

defense was a good offense and became proactive by training spokespeople from our industry and making sure they had opportunities to tell the industry-side of the story when the need or occasion arose.

Prior to receiving the spokesperson training, we were just “winging it” when asked for comments or interviews by the media or when we found ourselves in face-to-face debates with those with opposing views. Our comments or answers were often misunderstood, not well articulated, or even used as fuel for the other side. The importance of the spokesperson training cannot be overstated.

California producers saw the importance of being able to form and present a straight-forward, intelligent message about what we do, why we do it and how we do it, not only to the public, but to our detractors and critics; and it is working. We have created alliances with people, groups and agencies that previously spent a lot of time talking about us but not to us. Studies how the importance of ranching and grazing to habitats and biodiversity have been funded and conducted by groups and organizations, some of which, at one time, had advocated the removal of cattle from the rangelands.

Some critics are still out there ... they have not gone away or slacked off in their efforts, but we seem to have fewer and less credible critics now. For a change, we are able to have folks outside the industry speak up for us and help us fight some of our battles. Having this kind of support gives the public more confidence in us and what we say and do.

Without our industry associations, we are lone voices and even screaming the truth at the top our lungs, we may not be heard. But together, speaking confidently, knowing we have the belief in what we do and the facts and the research to back us up, we will continue to win people over.

Henry Ford said it better than I can, “Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success.”