



The Frank and Sims Price ranch in Sterling County, Texas, has a long and proud history. The family business was established near Santa Anna, Texas, in 1876 then relocated to Sterling County in 1882. Frank Price began full time management with his father in 1973. Sims Price, Frank's son, became a partner in 2011, and Frank and Sims are the 4th and 5th generation ranch managers. Both obtained degrees in Agricultural Economics from Texas Tech University.

The Frank and Sims Price ranching operation is composed of 68,000 acres of rangeland in west Texas. The business is composed of six different ranching units in Sterling, Glasscock, Nolan and Coke counties. Two of the units are leased land, but most of the operation is family owned. Headquarters is located thirteen miles west of Sterling City, Texas.

Frank and Sims have two primary goals for the operation. First, the ranch is operated as a stand-alone business, self sustaining, and is expected to show a profit annually. Drawing from his years of experience, Frank provides leadership in developing an annual budget with Sims working at his side. Frank says that having Sims now fully involved in the day-to-day business encourages both of them to be accountable to the process and to respect the budget.

The second management goal of the ranch is to leave their natural resources in as good a condition as possible for the next generation. They are both dedicated to this principle and it is as equally important as their economic goals.

"As I get older, I feel more strongly that what we leave for future generations is really important," says Frank.

Sims added, "If we don't take care of the land, when my children are operating the ranch it won't be a profitable business."

The Price family ranches in an area of approximately 18" of annual rainfall. With their ranches spread out over four counties, they ranch on a variety of ecological sites including Clay Loam and Shallow. Major forage species include Tobosa grass, Buffalo grass, Sideoats grama, Blue grama, Black grama, Silver bluestem, Plains bristlegrass, Western wheatgrass, Texas cupgrass, Canada wildrye and others. Quality forbs, like Engelmann daisy, are also present.

The ranch operates with three primary income enterprises including sheep, cattle and hunting. Frank's father

worked many years developing a herd of Debouillet sheep, a fine wool breed well adapted to the arid climate of west Texas. His primary goal was to create a stud flock. After years of genetic improvement, his sheep won every major wool show in the United States with wool clippings. Many sheep producers, including some from Australia, have visited the Price ranch to view the herd. Sheep used to be grazed, along with cattle, on all of the ranches.

“We’re grazing sheep on about 50 percent of our acres, now. I’m afraid we’re witnessing a struggling industry as we look at the sheep business, but I’m just not willing to give up the genetics that we have developed. Sheep work well with our cattle and I want to keep selling rams,” Frank said.

Hunting leases, primarily for whitetail deer, are a part of the Price ranch program. It is operated as a low-key enterprise with a limited amount of time and effort required by Frank and Sims.

“We offer our hunters a year-long lease,” says Frank. “Then, it’s pretty much up to them,” he added.

The ranch is in a Managed Land Deer Permit agreement with Texas Parks and Wildlife and the emphasis on harvest management is quality, not quantity. Annual harvest information is maintained. The Price family reserves some areas for family hunting.

Cattle are the primary source of income for the Price family and extensive effort is put into developing the herd to fit specific requirements for grazing ability, calving, weaning weight and temperament. The process begins as Frank and Sims buy tiger stripe heifers (at weaning weight) for replacements. These heifers are bred to a low birth weight Angus bull and the resulting calf is a “super baldy” that is 25 percent Brahman, 25 percent Hereford, and 50 percent Angus. These baldy heifers, along with their tiger stripe mothers, become herd’s foundation.

“It takes a while to develop them, but we want to raise them to fit our management style,” Frank said.

“Our Coke County ranch is steep and rough and we find that we must have some Brahman influence in our cattle for them to take advantage of that type of country. They work well on all our ranches,” Sims said.

The Price ranch has a strict policy that all cattle are handled in a low stress manner. After the new heifers are received they are handled gently every day to train them to the presence of horses and people. Before long, the cattle are trusting of ranch personnel. They will continue to be treated in this manner for the rest of their time on the ranch. One reason conditioning is necessary is that the grazing management system utilized on the ranch requires frequent moves through the pastures by livestock.



Charolais bulls are put out April 23 on mature super baldy cows and a month earlier on 1st calf heifers.

Calving begins Feb. 1. Although most calves are born in a few weeks, bulls are not picked up for 90 days. Late calving pairs can be held over or culled, depending upon ranch needs. Calves are weaned the second week of October across the fence from their mothers.

“We really like fence line weaning. Our cattle are gentle to start with and it’s a very low stress time for the cows and calves,” Frank said.

The weaned calves then go to a preconditioning area for about 60 days where they are supplemented with 20percent range cubes. A market contract is in place by August 15 to ship the calves in December weighing 725 to 775 pounds.

A strict vaccination protocol is established for all livestock. Vaccination against Bovine Trichomoniasis (trich) is included for the cows and trich testing on bulls is carried out if any violation of bulls with



neighboring livestock is detected. Calves receive growth implants. All this activity requires a lot of livestock handling, but their gentleness training, which began at calving, and the attitude of “letting them work themselves” makes the process go smoothly.

A variety of conservation practices are carried out on the Price ranch in the effort to enhance natural resources. In west Texas, brush management is a never-ending expense for all ranches, including the Price. It’s a kind of “damned if you do and damned if you don’t” situation according to Frank. The ranch deals with encroachment of mesquite, cedar, shin oak and prickly pear, and the species are often mixed. Under the grazing management system used by Frank and Sims, shin oak is not normally a problem, so attention is directed toward the other three species.

“We have decided that mechanical treatment on mesquite and cedar is our best bet in the long term,” Frank said. The ranch owns its own equipment and does most of the labor and maintenance. Most tree dozing is carried out with track loaders equipped with a grubber attachment on the front. The ranch also has an excavator that is used primarily for heavier brush densities.

The track loaders have cleats that cause some soil disturbance along with the grubbing process, but Frank and Sims welcome the result. They consider it part of seedbed preparation needed for grass establishment. Until recently, range planting of grasses has not taken place following the tree dozing. The dozed trees were left in place and were considered protection from grazing for the naturally germinating grasses. The holes left from tree dozing stored water during rainfall events. With the extended rest periods used in the grazing program, the dozed pastures soon develop a grass cover.

The ranch recently purchased a brush rake and is experimenting with the raking process. “I really like the way the raked areas look and we’re evaluating this closely,” said Frank.

All tree dozing of brush takes place with wildlife in mind. Frank likes a “savannah” look, so individual trees are left scattered through the pastures. Species including Hackberry, Live oak, and Soap berry are left standing. Also, areas several hundred feet wide are left completely undisturbed, primarily along draws, for deer runs. These deer runs are not left in straight lines, but rather in a more natural sculpted pattern. Frank and Sims work together designing their brush management projects, with Frank wanting to leave more brush for wildlife and Sims leaning toward taking more brush out of the pasture.

“Since I’m horseback most days, I’d probably take more brush out of the pastures, but Dad keeps me in check,” Sims said.

Frank and Sims agree that the key to long term success of mechanical brush management is follow-up treatment. This is accomplished in two ways, using either a low horse power grubber such as a skid steer, or using individual plant treatment with a chemical foliage spray.

“We have a hard time finding enough labor and/or time to do a good job of IPT,” said Frank. “However we do this follow up, it’s got to be done. We’re not going to invest what we have to for the initial treatment and then come back and do it again in 20 years.”

Another key part of the Price ranch brush control program is prescribed burning. Sims is now a certified prescribed burn manager and can design and carry out prescribed burns on the Price ranch even under marginal conditions.

“We use controlled burning on prickly pear and regrowth cedar because it’s the most cost effective practice we have,” Sims said. “It fits into our grazing management program because we can give a pasture extra rest from grazing to develop fuel for the burn, then rest it as needed after the burn. We put carbon and minerals back into the soil, and when it greens up it’s a fresh and nutritious pasture,” he added. Most burning is done on a pasture by pasture basis.

Sims is leaning toward using summer burning to increase effectiveness of the fire as a brush control method, but Frank is not convinced, still concerned about the marginal control of summer burns due to the extreme conditions. Most burns are carried out in late winter, just before spring green up. Burning is done when there is good soil moisture, but Frank emphasizes that they have to be ready to rest the pasture for a prolonged period after the burn if it quits raining and regrowth on the grasses is slow to come.

A cornerstone of the Frank and Sims Price ranch success is their use of a planned grazing system. The beneficial results of their planned grazing carried out over the last 40 years enables the father/son team to accomplish many other important facets of their business.

When Frank became involved with working on the ranch, his father was managing a traditional continuous grazing operation. As he worked day to day, Frank would move some livestock on his own and rest a pasture from grazing. Later, the family went through a period of “move them when you work them” and provided periodic grazing rest for some pastures. Then in the 1970s Frank began reading about cell grazing and combining livestock into one herd. The family at the time was grazing a unit composed of four pastures in Coke County, and as an experiment, all livestock on this unit were put into one herd and their first planned rotation began. They later lost this lease to a cousin, but not before Frank witnessed some improvement in the grass cover on the land.

Frank said he couldn’t get his mind off of the drought of the 1950s when he saw much of his ranch with nothing but “bare ground and tasajillo”. He knew he needed to do something different in order to move forward with the land. In 1980, at the encouragement of a friend and recalling the improvement he had seen in Coke County, Frank attended a week-long grazing school put on by Alan Savory and Stan Parsons.

“Savory and Parsons made me learn, “Frank said. “But, Parsons said I had a high RC factor, or resistance to change!” In time Frank got past some of his resistance and came away from the school excited about holistic management and the cell grazing concept. He immediately designed and built a cell system on 2409 acres with 14 paddocks using three-wire electric fence in a wagon wheel design. He began rotation grazing with cattle and sheep.



Working his way through the learning curve, Frank figured out how to operate and maintain fencing and watering systems. Some of his livestock had a “resistance to change” and when he decided he had too many cattle in the cell, he moved the ones that were not adapting. Within four years, he had installed five different grazing cells and was committed to the idea. As he managed the systems, he found that a 45-day rotation cycle was too fast. He often did not get pasture recovery that fast due to dry weather, so he settled into a 60 to 90 day rotation.

Frank ran these systems for about 15 years and saw improvement in his grass cover and overall health of the rangeland involved. One of the first things he noticed was healing of eroded Lacy Creek. Under continuous grazing, this creek had vertical banks, no grass cover, and you could only cross it in a few places horseback. Within a few years, due to the increased vegetation resulting from the months of grazing deferment, grass grew in the creek and silt from the neighbors began to build up along the drainage way.

“Now it’s a healthy stream with smooth banks and you can cross it anywhere you want to,” said Sims.

After years of management of the cell systems, Frank began to question whether it was “worth the fight”. He developed several issues with the intensive cell grazing concept. First, he decided the system didn’t provide him the “quality of life” that he wanted. “We were constantly opening and closing gates, moving the stock and working on water and fences,” he said. He was finding it difficult to keep

Reynolds Fall (Calve)						
Number Pastures	9	Cows	100			
Total Acres	8998	Calves	0			
Ave. Ac. per Pasture	1000	Yearlings	0			
Total Animal Units	120	Bulls	0			
Animal Units per Section	8.54	Aged Ewes	0			
Acres Per Animal Unit	74.92	Baby Lambs	0			
	Option 1	Option 2	Yrling Ewes	134		
Cycle Length	175		170 Bucks	0		
Total Days per Cycle	184		177 Goats			
Order of Rotation	Number Acres	Condition Factor	Option 1 Days/Pad	Option 2 Days/Pad	Pasture	Rest Period Move Date
1	1126	1.00	25	24	Middle	21-Mar-12
2	1293	0.85	24	23	East	14-Apr-12
3	1280	0.90	25	24	Northeast	7-May-12
4	1280	1.00	28	27	North	31-May-12
5	1280	1.00	28	27	Coyote	27-Jun-12
6	202	1.00	4	4	West Trap	24-Jul-12
7	310	1.00	7	7	East Trap	28-Jul-12
8	947	0.85	18	17	South	4-Aug-12
9	1280	0.90	25	24	Southeast	21-Aug-12
					Middle	14-Sep-12
					East	8-Oct-12
					Northeast	31-Oct-12
					North	24-Nov-12
					Coyote	21-Dec-12
					West Trap	17-Jan-13
					East Trap	21-Jan-13
					South	28-Jan-13
					Southeast	14-Feb-13
					Middle	10-Mar-13

Calve in Southeast and East & Middle

Data Sort A18..F24

Price Grazing Chart

the livestock away from the cell centers and didn't like the heavy use and trailing near the water supplies.

"We had fences everywhere, we couldn't drive and ride where we used to, and it all just seemed like it wasn't home," Frank said. And, a critical concern became the lack of animal performance that he expected.

"We could have possibly solved these issues, but I decided that I could carry out one-herd grazing using a traditional pasture design and still improve my land and increase animal performance," Frank said. So, in the mid-1990s, Frank and Sims started rolling up the electric fences and began moving the entire ranch toward one herd systems with traditional pastures. Only two intense systems remain and plans are underway to change them to traditional pasture design.

As more herds were combined, a dependable water supply became critical. "You can't get very far with intensive grazing without a good water system," Frank says. Since the ranch is in such an arid climate, livestock ponds are not reliable. Ground water is available, so about 90percent of the ranch is watered from wells. Electric submersible pumps, solar pumps, and windmills are utilized. Above ground storage, an extensive pipeline system, and a network of drinking troughs assures adequate, clean livestock water for their rotation system.

In any grazing management system, at least some fencing is required. Frank and Sims have developed a fencing design that works for them, using high tinsel net wire with an end brace design composed of a single end post and one "push brace".

"We can install this net wire, which we need for our sheep herd, for about the same price as a six-wire traditional barbed wire fence. I have found that this high tinsel wire is much more durable and I am confident it will be here serving my son's children," Frank said.

The Frank and Sims Price ranch today is operated as six different ranching units with 11 separate one-herd grazing units. They are also rotating their saddle horses through traps at two different locations.

"If I had a milk cow around the house," Frank said, "I'd try to figure out a way to rotate her grazing. There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that we are continuing to get improvement in our grass cover on the land with one-herd intensive rotation."

Pasture size in the rotation grazing units ranges from 100 acres to three sections, with an average size of about a section. The number of pastures per rotation ranges from four to 18. The ranch runs two lease places, and after completing some water development, both of them are involved in the intensive grazing system.

"The point is, you just have to figure out how to make it work. I've yet to see a place where it wouldn't work," Frank said.

Planning movement of livestock through all 11 rotation units is a complex issue. Moving livestock is discouraged during lambing and calving months. Also, an effort is made to have stock near working pens when work is scheduled. Probably most critical, the correct length of grazing and rest period to assure pasture health and improvement must be planned.

The duo has written a computer spread sheet to streamline the 11 grazing unit process. The spreadsheet takes into account the factors involved in planning livestock movement including: pasture size, number of pastures, current stocking rate, a "condition factor" and other items. Frank says that the condition factor, or pasture rating, is not a scientific number, but is his opinion on pasture productivity. Being on the land every day allows the family to note the capability of each pasture and still note grass cover. An average pasture has a rating of one and the rating goes up and down from there for each pasture. All of these factors come together to plan what is currently a 90 to 180 day grazing cycle. Livestock condition is monitored as they move

through the grazing units.

Frank has decided that one of the most enjoyable jobs he does is the periodic moving of one of his 11 herds to their next pasture. The cattle and sheep are trained and gentle and know what is expected of them. They look forward to the moves.

“When they see us horseback,” Frank said, “They anticipate the gate they will go through and are basically waiting for us there. They are very easy to manage.”

When asked what they believe the benefits of intensive grazing have been, Frank and Sims can make a long list:

The land is continually developing an improved cover of perennial grasses and ground cover. Adequate forage is available for both wildlife and livestock.

With the increased ground cover, rainfall filtration can take place on the land.

The ranch is weaning a 700 to 750 pound calf with a 92percent - 97percent conception rate on the base cow herd.

The ranch has supplied essentially no winter protein supplement to the base cow herd for 11 years (except during the extreme drought of 2011).

Labor required is drastically reduced because livestock must be checked at only 11 locations. It would take a much larger labor force to check stock in every pasture on the ranch.

Frank and Sims feel this style of management makes ranching life simple and enjoyable for the most part.

In 2011, the ranch was ravaged by the severe drought that plagued all of the southwest. Before the year was over, wildfires had burned about 25percent of the Price ranch. In order to allow healing of the land, Frank and Sims drastically reduced their livestock inventory.

“We are always in a constant state of drought. We just get lucky once in a while and get a rain,” Frank said. Their grazing system, which has resulted in strong root systems on the grasses and a good cover on the land, will help insulate the Price ranch from the long term drought effects.

In their typical modest fashion, Frank and Sims said, “We do not think we have the perfect grazing management plan, but it works for us. Every ranch needs to develop a plan that works for them.”

Frank and Sims Price have worked with agricultural agencies for many years and considered them as partners in their effort to do a good job of managing their ranch resources. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has provided many hours of technical assistance on subjects including brush management, cross fencing, water development and prescribed burning. The Price ranch has utilized various cost share programs including the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to aid in installing conservation practices. The ranch has also been awarded a Conservation Security Program contract. This agreement requires that the ranch be operating at a high level of management in order to be awarded a contract.

“Monetary rewards always help a livestock producer,” Frank said. “This assistance helps us move forward with our intensive grazing management plans.” Price ranch has also been assisted by the brush control program sponsored by the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board.

For many years Frank has agreed to spend time on his ranch with new NRCS employees to allow them to see activities on a production ranch level. Frank feels this gives him a chance to not only share information about running a ranch, but to also help the individuals understand what producers need and expect from NRCS personnel. Texas AgriLife Extension has also assisted in projects on the ranch, from brush control to youth 4H activities. Chad Coburn, Texas Agrilife Extension Agent, said that Frank was one of the first ranchers in Sterling County during his term as the Extension Agent to use the NUTBAL PRO software to aid in analyzing nu-

tritional value of livestock forage.

“I have been really fortunate that NRCS and Extension have both worked very well with me on the same projects, like brush control, Frank said. “Cooperation among the agencies always works better and I have always been impressed with how they worked together.”

Frank has worked diligently for many years to “give back” to the community by offering use of his time and resources to local organizations. He is active on the Sterling City Economic Development Board, Sterling County Nursing Home Board, Sterling County Underground Water District, and served 16 years on the local school board. In addition, he serves on the Angelo State University Ag Advisory Board, Grazing Land Conservation Initiative Board of Directors and is an advisory member of the Texas Predator Management Board. He is also on the Advisory Board for the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources at Texas Tech University.

As Frank and Sims have increasingly used controlled burning on their ranch, they have developed a high degree of expertise in the use of fire as a tool and also gained valuable knowledge of dealing with wildfire on west Texas rangelands. They work diligently with area ranchers in coordinating efforts to protect life and property during wildfire events, lending not only their knowledge, but any resources they have available. In 2011, after a particularly devastating wildfire called the Wildcat Fire, Frank was instrumental in initiating state level cooperation with the Texas Forest Service and the Texas A&M system to improve communication, increase coordination of efforts and advance the overall effectiveness of fighting rural wildfire. He and other selected ranchers are helping to develop a statewide system called Fire Adapted Ranch Program.



Frank is a member of the Texas Section Society for Range Management, Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association, and is a director in the Texas Sheep and Goat Raisers Association.

The challenge of a true conservationist in production agriculture is to make a living from the business while at the same time improving natural resources for use of future generations. Even though they live in a challenging and drought-prone environment, Frank and Sims Price have found that balance. Neighbors have talked to the Price's about leasing their grazing land to the Price ranch, saying, "Make it look like yours!"

"We couldn't come anywhere close to making a profit in our livestock operation without letting the land work for us," says Frank. "The only way we can do that is through a good grazing program so we can keep our livestock numbers at a level where we can make a profit. We are constantly changing and adapting our program and making it flow with our land."

Sims Ranch

Established in 1882



...and still going strong!