

- **Aging Operators and Unsure Succession Plans:** The median age of California ranchers continues to rise, and the prospect for younger generations succeeding these operations continue to decrease. The number of farms and ranches also continues to decrease, while the average farm or ranch size is smaller in California than the national average. There are no state-wide initiatives or programs to assist ranchers in succession planning, although some events occurred in 2023 (e.g., [2023 Ag Legacy Symposium](#)), and the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program developed guidance, "[Pathways for the Next Generation](#)", in 2023.
- The **interannual variability** of rangeland quality and productivity can make livestock management highly uncertain. Successful and well-managed grazing requires flexible grazing contracts that allow for a variety of production conditions in any given year, and adaptive frameworks to guide managers to make the best grazing management decisions for the conditions present at any given time. **Rigid grazing agreements** exacerbate these management challenges, particularly those that base agreement renewals on performance criteria and/or compliance constraints, such as contracts that dictate the minimum or maximum amount of vegetation that can or must be removed, the exact number of animals allowed on a parcel, or rigid on/off dates that do not allow for bioclimatic variability. For example, in the heavy rainfall year that was 2023, many graziers could not enter allotments until after May due to saturated soils and the potential for damage, but grazing agreements would not allow animals into allotments after May. This resulted in displaced animals with limited options for feed, overgrown areas that could not be grazed, and organizations on all sides failing to meet their ecological, social, and economic goals, in addition to unmitigated fire risk and public safety concerns due to high fuel loads. Limited grazing contract terms of 1–5 years are also a major impediment to grazing. Graziers may be unable or unwilling to invest time and money into proper management and maintenance of a parcel that they may not be allowed access to over the longer term (e.g., 10+ years). While the state-mandated limitations on contract duration of five years is unlikely to change in the near future, the efforts of the SLGLLM are intended to assist grazing operators and land managers in navigating the process of finding and applying for grazing permits, developing grazing licenses, and producing complementary and adaptive grazing management plans to better ensure successful environmental outcomes for the permittee and landowners.
- A variety of fuel management activities are commonly used throughout California, including mechanical and manual treatments, prescribed fire, and herbicide application. While livestock grazing is increasingly at the forefront of vegetation management discussions, it still lags in use across the state for a variety of reasons, including **organizational or community resistance to grazing for fuels reduction**. For example, CAL FIRE published Fuels Reduction Guidance in 2021² which included most of these vegetation management activities except for information on prescribed grazing. The RMAC received several inquiries from stakeholders as to why CAL FIRE did not include information on prescribed grazing as a fuels management tool, and in response, the RMAC offered to produce an informational pamphlet addendum and a more in-depth white paper addressing prescribed herbivory as a fuels management tool for use alone or in combination with other tools. While CAL FIRE received the draft copy of the pamphlet addendum and considered including it in the current or future versions of their Fuels Reduction Guidance, ultimately it was

² <https://www.fire.ca.gov/media/4jgerfjh/fuels-reduction-guide-final-2021-interactive.pdf>

