A broad range of topics will be discussed by expert speakers at the fifth annual Western Sustainable Ag Crops and Livestock Conference Dec. 3 at Ogallala, including growing crops in high tunnels, mobile meat processing and using the same field for both crops and grazing.

“Integrating Crop and Livestock Enterprises—Strengthen Your Operation and Reduce Risks” is the theme of the conference, which will take place at the Quality Inn, 201 Chuckwagon Road, from 8:45 a.m. until 3:45 p.m. MT.

Keynote speaker Don Tanaka, research soil scientist with U.S. Department of Agriculture Agricultural Research Service, will speak about integrating grazing into crop production, especially no-till crops. Tanaka has been conducting a long-term research project at the Northern Great Plains Research Laboratory at Mandan, ND, since 1999.

“We were looking at integration of crops and livestock to extend the grazing system for dry-bred cows,” Tanaka said. “The cropping system was developed under no-till, so a number of questions came up as to the impact of livestock production on no-till crop production, and how the cropping systems have extended the grazing system for the cow herd.”

Tanaka’s site is rain-fed agriculture. Crop rotations were developed based on the class of animals that would be grazed. Since the herds consisted of cows without calves, the forage quality didn’t have to be as high, he pointed out.

The rotation consisted of oats underseeded with a cover crop, followed by sorghum sudan underseeded with a cover crop, followed by corn for grain. The plots at Mandan allowed each crop to be planted every year, as well as a check plot that livestock did not graze on.

When Tanaka began researching integrated crop and livestock production, cattle prices were really low and profit margins were tight. Crop residues were used then, and grazing the fields allowed for producing crops with less fertilizer.

Tanaka said integrated grazing and cropping systems can fit crop producers as well as livestock producers. For example, one farmer might not have livestock, but his neighbor does, and this could reassure him about the potential effects of grazing, Tanaka said.

Registration deadline is Nov. 29. For registration and information about the conference or exhibitor booths, contact Extension educator Karen DeBoer at the UNL Extension Office, P.O. Box 356, 920 Jackson St., Sidney, NE 69162. Phone: 308-254-4455 or 866-865-1703; Email: kdeboer1@unl.edu. To download a brochure and registration form, go to http://www.ckb.unl.edu.

Tanaka also will cover integrating crops and livestock in one of the six workshops scheduled throughout the day. Other workshop topics include:

Renewable Harvest—Mobile USDA Meat Processing Unit: Kelly Mashek will provide information on how to build a mobile processing unit and an expert team that offers free advice to individuals and groups with HACCP plan writing, local and state regulations and coordinating builders. This mobile unit helps farmers to market USDA-certified red meats to schools, grocers, restaurants, consumers or other institutions.

High Tunnels for Western Nebraska: Laurie Hodges, professor in the Department of Agronomy & Horticulture, UNL School of Natural Resources, will include management, microclimate factors to consider, what types of crops do well, selected crops, crop and tunnel management and wind bracing. Hodges does research and extension on commercial vegetables and specialty cut flowers. For the past 10 years, she has been using organic production methods in the field and high tunnels.

Regulations and Licensure of Sustainable Ag Crops and Livestock in Nebraska: Kim McKenna, state health inspector with the Department of Agriculture, will cover regulations and licensure for poultry, livestock and locally grown foods in Nebraska. Contact information, permit requirements, establishment requirements and farmer’s market guidelines will be discussed. In addition, Liz Sarno, UNL Extension Educator, Nebraska Poultry Growers Non-stock Cooperative Inc. will explain how the on-farm federal exempt poultry processing plant was developed so farmers can process poultry for resale in grocery stores, institutions and farmer’s markets within the state.

Research Update on Cover Crops for Grazing Cattle: Karla H Jenkins, cow/calf and range management specialist at the UNL Panhandle Research and Extension center, will present preliminary data on forage biomass and nutrient quality of cover crops for beef cattle in the semi-arid, high altitude region of the High Plains. Her research focuses on increasing profitability while sustaining the range resource. Gary and Catherine Morris of Hidden Valley Ranches of Wood Lake will discuss their operation, where they produce cows and bulls that will thrive on low (7 - 9 percent) protein forage with little to no supplementation.

Beginning Farmers and SARE Farmer/Rancher Grants: Gary Lesoing, Nebraska State SARE Coordinator and Extension Educator, and William Powers, Executive Director of the Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society (NSAS), will explain the Beginning Famers Program, a series of workshops designed to help farmers learn skills to farm sustainably. They will explain how to apply for a SARE Farmer and rancher grants.