



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



# POLL REVEALS

South Dakotans value healthy grasslands, clean water, resiliency, healthy soil among top-cited benefits



According to a recent poll sponsored by the South Dakota Grassland Coalition (SDGC) and conducted by the nationally renowned polling firm, Selzer & Company, South Dakota’s registered voters overwhelmingly value the on- and off-ranch benefits of healthy grasslands. Importantly, they also strongly support efforts to protect and enhance those grasslands.

## About the poll

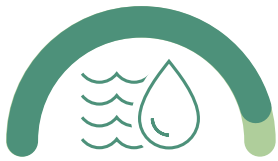
The telephone poll of 505 randomly selected voters in South Dakota, has a margin of error of plus or minus 4.4 percentage points. It was sponsored by SDGC to guide the organization’s efforts to educate South Dakota residents about the benefits of, and on-going threats to, healthy grasslands.

## Results show strong support for healthy grasslands

By wide margins, South Dakota voters indicated support for programs and activities to encourage farmers, ranchers and state and local officials to: *“pay more attention to preserving and expanding South Dakota’s grassland.”*

In what veteran pollster J. Ann Selzer describes as “broad bi-partisan support,” strong majorities of respondents cited the following **TOP-FIVE HEALTHY GRASSLANDS BENEFITS** as “excellent” or “good” reasons to support such efforts.

93%



### CLEAN WATER

Well-managed grasslands slow water movement which minimizes runoff of topsoil and fertilizers into waterways, improving water quality and reducing downstream flooding.

88%



### LAND, FOOD, PRODUCTION RESILIENCE

Unlike crops such as soybeans and corn, grassland plants have deep roots and so are resilient to extreme weather events.

86%



### NATURALLY GROW FOOD

Grassland-fed beef is increasingly desirable to consumers, with an added benefit that manure enriches the soil, replacing some commercial fertilizer.

84%



### CARBON SEQUESTRATION

Preserving and expanding healthy grasslands removes carbon from the air and so has benefits in addressing climate change.

83%



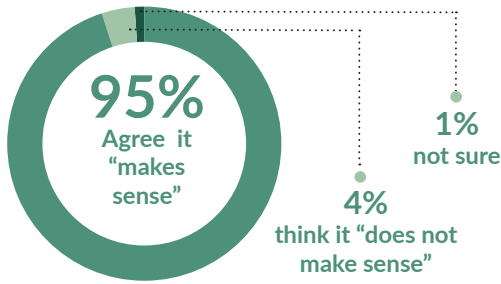
### PLANT SPECIES PRESERVATION

Preserving grasslands means protecting more native species valuable to Native Americans for traditional medicines and ceremonies.

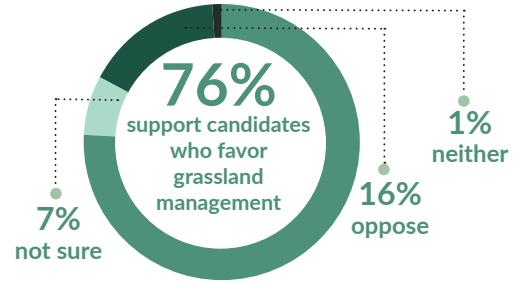
\* photo above by Joe Dickie



## Grasslands in Harmony with South Dakotans' Values



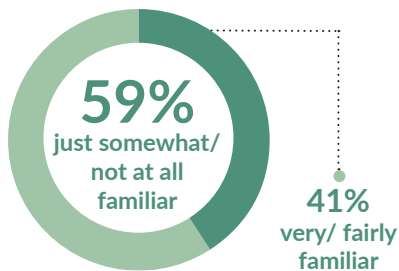
An astounding 95 percent of the poll's respondents indicated: "In general, it makes sense that when native plants and animals share the same soil, they both benefit and that when native plants put down deep roots and they are better prepared to survive natural disasters and be available for livestock to eat. Plants use manure from livestock to grow. Humans benefit from a habitat that protects and preserves water and is sustainable for the future."



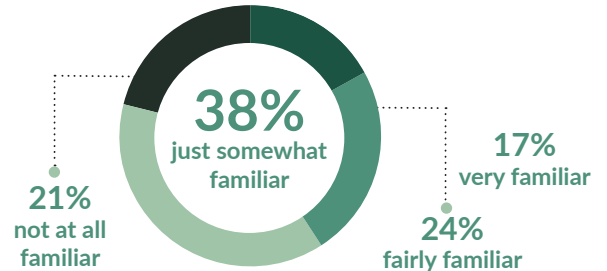
About three-quarters (76 percent) of the respondents indicated they were also more likely to support political candidates who favor government programs that enhance healthy grasslands management.



## Opportunity for Additional Education



While more than half of the respondents were aware of facts related to grasslands' economic impacts, rain infiltration benefits and biodiversity, less than half of the respondents were aware of key facts regarding grassland-to-cropland conversion threats, carbon storage capacity and native grassland plant functions and root systems.



When asked, "In general, how familiar would you say you are with grasslands in South Dakota: very familiar, fairly familiar, just somewhat familiar, or not at all familiar?" only 41 percent of respondents indicated that they were "very" or "fairly" familiar with grasslands.



## Expanding "Where Good Things Grow" to Healthy Grasslands

The polling data reveal strong, across-the-board registered voter support for protecting and enhancing grasslands—the most threatened ecosystem in North America. The results also show that while the respondents have some general knowledge of the basics and benefits of grasslands, more education is needed, along with the identification of clear actions interested citizens can take to help ensure the health and preservation of Dakota grasslands.

To address those awareness and education needs, the South Dakota Grasslands Coalition recently received funding through a USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service cooperative grant to develop a healthy grasslands public service and education campaign, similar to the on-going "South Dakota's Healthy Soil - Where Good Things Grow" public service campaign. This new campaign will seek to further inform South Dakota residents about key facts regarding the basics, benefits and threats to Dakota's healthy grasslands and their connection to management practices that improve soil health in grasslands.

## A guide for campaign planning and execution

The grasslands polling research summarized in this report provides critical insights regarding South Dakota registered voters' awareness of, and their associated values with, grasslands. Over the course of the next three years, the findings from this study will guide the development and execution of the strategic communications plan and message

crafting for the public service campaign's associated tactics—with the goal to improve the public's understanding of the basics, benefits and threats to Dakota's healthy grasslands and their connection to management practices that improve the health and resilience of our living grasslands."