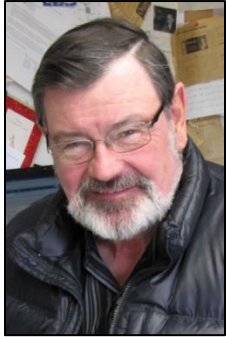


# Director's Comments: A Look Back over the Past Thirty Years

*Paul E. Nyren, Director of Central Grasslands Research Extension Center from 1981-2012*



When Anne and I arrived at the Central Grasslands in 1981, there was no permanent staff to look after the day-to-day maintenance of the building and facilities. North Dakota State University had obtained the title to the property in

1979 but no operating budget was appropriated. The land was rented for the two-year period until the 1981 legislature appropriated an operating budget. The money obtained from the land rental was used to fund a number of research projects, the most important of which was a vegetative survey of the plant communities of the Center. Other projects included studies by the Horticulture, Animal Science, and Agriculture Economics Departments at NDSU.

In 1981 the 47th Legislature Assembly appropriated funds for the hiring of a Director, Animal Scientist, and a technician. Anne volunteered as the office manager/accountant until she was hired on permanently later that year. One hundred and fifty bred heifers were purchased to calve in 1982. The 48th legislative assembly in 1983 appropriated \$75,000 to improve the livestock facilities and drill a well at the livestock unit. Three pole barns were moved from the north farmstead to the livestock unit since this area was better suited for livestock management and research. These first few years



were very trying as we had a very small budget, a very small staff, the largest Center in the system, no office, and very little equipment.

The first research was a grass variety trial seeded in the spring of 1981 before we moved to the Center. Several trials were started the first two years including a short-duration grazing system, a twice-over grazing trial, and a complementary grazing trial.

In 1987 a modular home was purchased for \$8,000. It was moved to



the Center and placed on a basement. The Center staff completed the site preparation and landscaping for a total investment of just over \$42,000. In 2007 an addition to the office building was completed which contained six additional offices, a laboratory and, on the ground floor, a conference room to seat 80 people. The total cost of the new addition was \$350,000 of which the center had to raise \$80,000. Additional buildings that have been added over the past 30 years include a shop/machinery storage building, a building to house the livestock working facilities, two pole barns for machinery storage, and two seasonal greenhouses.

Today the Center is one of the largest employers in the area with a staff of 11 which includes five scientists. The Center is well positioned for the future with extremely productive and dedicated scientists who are internationally recognized in their chosen fields, and an excellent support staff.

**Then**



**Now**



One of the first projects was the improvement of the livestock facilities.



Before livestock pens were built, a few rocks had to be moved.



In 1983 the old pens were removed and new ones built, and a well was drilled to supply water to the livestock facilities.



There was no office building until 1987 when we were able to purchase a modular building and convert it into the current office building.



The first field day was held in August of 1981. Our 30<sup>th</sup> annual tour was held in June 2011.

---

The following poem by North Dakota-born poet Rudolf G. Ruste was printed on the cover of the first Central Grasslands Research Extension Center annual report. It is reprinted here because it is as poignant now as it was then.

### **The Last of the Virgin Sod**

We broke today on the homestead  
The last of the virgin sod,  
And a haunting feeling oppressed me  
That we'd marred a work of God.

A fragrance rose from the furrow,  
A fragrance both fresh and old;  
It was fresh with the dew of morning,  
Yet aged with time untold.

The creak of leather and clevis,  
The rip of the coulter blade,  
And we wreck what God with the labor  
Of a million years had made.



I thought, while laying the last land,  
Of the tropical sun and rains,  
Of the jungles, glaciers and oceans  
Which had helped to make these plains.

Of monsters, horrid and fearful,  
Which reigned in the land we plow,  
And it seemed to me so presumptuous  
Of man to claim it now.

So when, today on the homestead,  
We finished the virgin sod,  
Is it strange I almost regretted  
To have marred that work of God?

*CGREC Annual Report - December 2011*