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Technologic advances provide tools, not 'magic beans'

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Hello, I'm Rob

Cook. I have spent the last 11 years working for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). In September, I left my position

with the NRCS in Amarillo, Texas, and joined the Noble Foundation as a pasture and range consultant. This has been an exciting time for my family as well as an exciting time for agriculture. Everywhere we turn things are changing. There is a new technology or innovation that promises to make some part of our lives easier. It is almost impossible for a person to keep up. As I think about this, I realize that in many ways technology has made our lives easier. Although, one look at the average family sitting down at the dinner table with their heads buried in some type of "smart" device, I realize that we sometimes allow technology to replace or interfere with some of our core values. The agriculture industry is not immune from this.

The term "magic bean" comes from the old child's fable "Jack and the Magic Beanstalk." We all know the producer who is constantly looking for the "magic bean." They are always in search of the new type of grass that cannot be grazed out, is ex-



tremely drought tolerant and doesn't require nutrients to grow. There is always talk about a grazing system that will double stocking rates or the breed of beef cattle that has 600-pound weaning weights with no inputs. I know I'm guilty of always looking for that new technological tool, like Global Information Systems for instance, that will make me more efficient. At some point or another, everyone has probably tried to rely

on some new innovation or technology to bypass our core values or foundation. We have yet to develop a grass that doesn't require water, ample leaf area for photosynthetic material and healthy soil to grow. The breed of cow that can produce a heavy calf every year on dirt, three-awns and a little hay hasn't been developed. Even with new innovations in plant and animal genetics and advancements in geographic ▶

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information systems (GIS) and other technologies, we must still rely on sound grazing management techniques, beef cattle management and nutrition principles, and good old-fashioned hard work as a foundation to properly manage our resources.

Please don't misunderstand me. Farmers and ranchers will need to continue to feed an ever growing

world population with fewer and fewer resources available for production. This will only be accomplished with technological advances and innovative ideas. Those new ideas and technologies must be used as tools to help build upon the foundations and best management practices that have been put in place. Innovation might change the way we view

or understand these founding principles and practices, but it will never allow us to bypass them. I'm excited about my new position with the Noble Foundation and look forward to working with you, the agricultural producer, on founding forage production principles as well as new and innovative practices and technologies to improve production agriculture. ■