Most would say that cows don’t go up steep slopes, climb hills or travel far from water, but some just take off for the hills. As grazers, cattle provide ecological benefits to natural areas and help control invasive weeds, but overgrazing can damage riparian areas and can affect downstream water quality. A possible solution? Hill-climbing cattle, which could increase ranchers’ stocking rates as much as 30 percent and improve the productivity of rangeland in the western United States.

New Mexico State University Range Science Professor Derek Bailey and his team of scientists across the West used SARE funding to look at the genetics of behavior—specifically to identify the genes linked to hill climbing—to develop an inexpensive screening test that allows ranchers to select stock with a genetic disposition to wander and climb. By tagging cattle on ranches with GPS collars, tracking their every move and drawing blood from the hill-climbers to identify genetic commonalities, Bailey’s team collected and analyzed enough data to believe that an affordable screening test is possible and that the hill-climbing trait does not come with significant genetic downsides. More hill-climbing cows would allow ranchers across the West to use harder-to-reach areas for grazing and to thus better manage their rangeland.

For more information on these projects, see www.sare.org/projects, and search for project number SW15-015.
SARE Grants in New Mexico

SARE has awarded a total of 69 grants in New Mexico since 1988.

SARE’s Impact

53 percent of producers report using a new production technique after reading a SARE publication.

79 percent of producers said they improved soil quality through their SARE project.

64 percent of producers said their SARE project helped them achieve higher sales.

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For detailed information on SARE projects, go to www.SARE.org

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