ABSTRACT

TITLE:	For the Love of Ranching: Surviving a Fading American Tradition in Ouray County, Colorado
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ABSTRACT: It is well-known that agriculture is deeply rooted in American tradition, historically placing the farmer and rancher in a special place that forms American national identity and shapes our national character. To this day, cattle ranchers arguably remain practitioners of the most romantic and most American of all occupations. However, over the last 80 years, small independent cattle producers have rapidly dwindled in number. The purpose of this research is to portray and explain the interrelated transformations that are currently occurring on family cattle ranches in Ouray County, Colorado. Based on ethnographic research on five family-operated cattle ranches, this paper explores how Federal farm policies, industrialization, and global and local economic forces intersect with the realities of these cattle ranchers. Furthermore, it reveals that these cattle ranchers remain in the industry because of the lifestyle it creates, and that they implement various managerial strategies similar to those used during the 1980s farm crisis to achieve their long term goals, while struggling to survive in a continuous state of hardship.