

NCR SARE Research and Education Proposal--2014

Brokering relationships between livestock producers, non-farming landowners, and beginning farmers

Start date: October 1, 2014

End date: September 30, 2017

Project Duration: 3 years

Project Coordinator:

Laura Paine

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Institution name: Southwest Badger Resource Conservation and Development Council

Institution Official Information: Cara Carper, Executive Director

Type of project: Education.

Systems Category: Education and Training

Commodity Category: Hay and Forage Crops

Participating Institutions and Organizations:

Cara Carper, Southwest Badger RC&D

Laura Paine, WI Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection

Joe Sellers, Iowa State University

Jim Paulson, University of Minnesota

Dick Cates, University of Wisconsin

Terry VanDerPol, Land Stewardship Project

Jane Jewett, Green Lands Blue Waters

Greg Nowicki, WI Grass-fed Beef Coop

Todd Churchill, Thousand Hills Cattle Company

Project Abstract (400 words): currently 400

Contract grazing can provide a framework for bringing together non-farming landowners, livestock producers and beginning farmers for mutually beneficial relationships. This project will utilize a variety of activities to explore the potential of this business model to provide a foundation for such partnerships resulting in establishment and maintenance of soil conserving perennial pastures and profitable livestock operations.

Contract Grazing (also known as custom grazing) is a livestock production system in which land ownership, livestock ownership, and management of the system may be de-coupled. This arrangement can involve as many as three separate entities carrying out three distinct roles: a land owner, a livestock owner, and a grazier (the grazing manager) who provides the pasture management expertise. It is a flexible business model that spreads

financial risk over multiple entities, potentially providing benefits not only to the partners, but to the environment and the local economy. As Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contracts expire across the North Central Region, some of the tens of thousands of acres under contract could be retained under soil conserving grasslands through these partnerships.

This project promotes contract grazing as a means of maintaining land in perennial forages by pairing up non-farming landowners with like-minded livestock producers, including both livestock owners and livestock graziers. Non-farming landowners control an estimated 55 to 65% of arable land in the upper Mississippi basin. We have found, from previous projects, that many non-farming landowners have several goals for their land that encompass not only income generation, but also aesthetics, environmental stewardship, or avocation. Contract grazing may be an attractive alternative to renting for annual rowcrop production, one that also provides opportunities for livestock producers and beginning farmers. Leasing is a viable option to improve resiliency of existing livestock operations by providing access to additional acres for pasture and forage production. Partnering with experienced livestock producers in a contract grazing agreement may also present an opportunity for beginning farmers to access land and gain management skills as a stepping stone to livestock and farm ownership.

Project activities will include a regional contract grazing conference; a three part local workshop series in each state including a workshop for landowners, one for livestock producers, and a meet-and-greet ('speed dating') session bringing the two groups together; a trial beginning grazer mentorship program in cooperation with beginning farmer programs in the three states; and a survey of non-farming landowners to assess their interests and needs.

Project Description (100 words): currently 100

This project will foster the establishment of contract grazing as a model for livestock production in Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin by providing opportunities for partnership between livestock producers, beginning farmers, and non-farming landowners. Contract grazing can increase the number of grassland acres available for livestock production, increase livestock production capacity, help beginning farmers in get established in farming, and provide non-farming landowners with an income and other benefits from well-managed grazing on their land. Project partners will carry out a multi-state conference, in-state workshop series, and build a network among target audiences to support formation of successful contract grazing relationships.

Project Outcomes (400 words): currently 393 words

This project seeks to raise awareness of the opportunities contract grazing can provide for three distinct audiences: non-farming landowners, established livestock producers/owners, and beginning farmers. The underlying goals of this project are to use contract grazing as a means of increasing the acreage of well-managed pasture in the three-state region and supporting the livestock industry by increasing herd sizes and/or helping new farmers get established.

1) Beginning livestock farmers will gain knowledge of contract grazing as a means of getting started farming. One of the biggest hurdles to getting established as a farmer is access to land. Contract grazing may offer opportunities for beginning farmers to partner with experienced livestock producers on rented pastures. Mentoring relationships with established livestock producers will provide opportunities for beginning farmers to gain skills in managing livestock, pasture, and the livestock business as a stepping stone to farm ownership.

2) Non-farming landowners will gain awareness of additional choices for land management decisions. These landowners may have several goals for their land that encompass not only income generation, but also aesthetics, environmental stewardship, avocation, or farm transfer in the case of retiring farmers. These

landowners will gain knowledge of the potential of contract grazing as a means of achieving their goals by maintaining or establishing well-managed, income generating grasslands on their property. They will gain an understanding of how to access information and make connections with likeminded producers and as a result, will make better informed decisions about managing their land.

3) Livestock producers will learn about how to use contract grazing to improve the resilience and economic performance of their operations by gaining access to additional grassland acreage. Contract grazing provides opportunities to consider expanding herd size, diversifying the operation, or providing forage reserves under drought conditions. This may present opportunities for growing a business, bringing on a partner, or transitioning to the next generation. They will gain knowledge of the economics and logistics of renting pasture and forage production land.

We have brought together partners in Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin that have existing programs for beginning farmers, farm transfer assistance, grazing and livestock management, and farm business management. This project will build on and add value to these programs. In addition, it will contribute knowledge about, and contact with, non-farming landowners, a largely unknown and underserved audience that controls an estimated 40 million acres in the region.

Method/Approach (400 words): currently 398

This project will build on and integrate several existing successful projects including the Southwest Badger RC&D Grazing Broker project, Green Lands Blue Waters Perennial Forages working group, Land Stewardship Project's experience with non-farming landowners, and beginning farmer programs in each state. Existing resources we will utilize include the GLBW's contract grazing fact sheets, the Grazing Broker project's landowner profile tool, and the WI School for Beginning Dairy Farmer's mentor/intern handbook.

Planned activities:

1) A regional contract grazing conference that will bring together livestock producers, landowners, livestock managers, beginning farmers, and agricultural educators who are doing or are interested in contract grazing. In addition to education on contract grazing, the conference will provide a forum for communication among participants. Speakers will include producers and landowners experienced in contract grazing.

2) One or more three-workshop series in each state. A workshop for non-farming landowners will introduce managed grazing and assist them in identifying financial and other goals for their land. A second workshop will target producers and beginning farmers and will increase understanding of the economics, logistics, and legalities of leasing land. The third workshop will bring together landowners and producers for a 'speed dating' or meet-and-greet session. The Southwest Badger Grazing Broker project has conducted this series in Wisconsin and has had very positive results.

3) Develop, in cooperation with beginning farmer programs in each state, a trial program for mentoring beginning graziers by experienced livestock producers. Some of the funding requested will go toward paying the mentor farmers for their work in these arrangements.

4) A research project to determine effective ways of identifying and communicating with non-farming landowners and a survey to assess their interests in contract grazing and determine their educational needs in managing their land.

5) Products to be developed:

- a. Customizable contract grazing lease templates: taking the best of existing examples of pasture

- leases, develop a customizable lease form suited to this region and this purpose.
- b. Producer profile form: a 'resume' of the producer and a grazing land needs summary to complement the existing landowner profile that describes the land being offered for rent and landowner objectives.
 - c. A land connection website where landowner profiles and producer profiles can be posted, including maps of locations and links to aerial photos of the properties, and a mechanism to facilitate landowner-producer connections.
 - d. A report on methods of identifying and connecting with non-farming landowners.

Relevance (250 words): currently 220

This project educates beginning farmers, livestock producers and non-farming landowners on the opportunities presented by contract grazing. It provides beginning farmers a means of gaining access to land through partnerships with non-farming landowners and gaining skills in managed grazing through mentorship arrangements with experienced livestock producers. It provides livestock producers access to additional grazing acres, reducing production risk and providing opportunities for herd expansion. It provides environmentally friendly alternatives to non-farming landowners wishing to generate income and conserve soils by renting their land for managed grazing. Over the next several years, tens of thousands of acres of CRP contracts will expire. The public investment in these grasslands can be preserved and built on by maintaining them in profitable pasture and hay production.

The Green Lands Blue Waters collaborative, among others in the region, seeks to address Gulf of Mexico hypoxia issues by increasing the acreage of continuous living cover in the Upper Mississippi basin. The 'sleeping giant' is the more than 50% of landowners in the region who don't farm their own land. Many of these acres are currently rented out to cash grain farmers for annual row crop production, but could be managed under perennial forages if the landowners had a means of connecting with like-minded producers. This project explores effective methods of creating those connections.

Impact (400 words): currently 374

This project demonstrates contract grazing as a business model that provides benefits to non-farming landowners, livestock producers and beginning farmers.

Beginning farmers will be partnered with mentor farmers and explore opportunities to embark on a profession of livestock and grazing management or to establish their own farming operation. Backgrounding beef cattle, finishing for grass-fed beef, and raising dairy heifers are potential enterprises that are suited to the contract grazing model. Consumer demand for grass-fed and natural beef is growing, providing opportunities for expansion or entry into these premium markets. Contract grazing could contribute to making the North Central Region a major supplier of sustainably produced livestock for these markets.

Non-farming landowners have few educational programs that address their land management needs and interests, in spite of the fact they control 55 to 65% of the arable land in the region. Cooperative Development Services estimates there are 200,000 individual parcels under lease in the Upper Mississippi basin with an average size of 200-225 acres. This represents at least 40 million acres of land. The workshops, research, and survey planned for this audience will provide valuable information on these landowners' goals, provide them access to alternatives to renting for annual crop production, and help them connect with likeminded producers. Capturing 10% of those parcels for perennial forage would help meet water quality goals within the Upper Mississippi basin.

Livestock producers will learn how to identify, evaluate, and gain access to rental land for additional grazing or hay production. There are almost 50,000 beef operations in WI, MN, and IA (2007 Census of Agriculture). An analysis of Census cost of production data suggests that farms over 50 head benefit dramatically from economies of scale (<http://datcp.wi.gov/uploads/Farms/pdf/2011BeefGrazingSummary.pdf>). Only about 17% of beef operations in the region are greater than 50 head. By connecting livestock producers with non-farming landowners and beginning farmers, opportunities for growth of new or existing enterprises such as backgrounding, cow-calf, finishing, or custom-raising dairy heifers may be possible. By addressing the barriers of land access and availability of skilled labor for grazing, contract grazing can increase the percentage of livestock producers achieving economies of scale.

All groups will gain an understanding and comfort-level in interacting and partnering with the others using the structure created by contract grazing.

Suitability of Method (400 words): currently 398

This project addresses fundamental issues of soil conservation and land access by creating a framework to bring together people with complementary resources—land, expertise, livestock—to establish and manage mutually beneficial partnerships.

We found no previous SARE projects that focused on bringing these three groups together within a contract grazing framework. Several previous NE region SARE projects have focused on providing access to land for beginning farmers, but no projects with our proposed focus have been conducted in the NC region. Several SARE projects on transitioning CRP acreage back into agricultural production were conducted in the 1990s. We can build on this knowledge as we work with landowners whose CRP contracts are expiring by providing them with alternatives to renting for annual crop production. Several SARE projects have focused on grazing management for beef production, including our 2010 project titled *Grass-fed and Organic Beef: Production Cost and Profit Potential*. We learned from that project that many beef producers would benefit from keeping better track of their cost of production, could reduce risk by accessing secure sources of low cost forages and grazing land, and could potentially become more profitable by achieving economies of scale.

The project brings together a diverse and extensive group of partners, including farmers and regional beef companies, land grant universities, beginning farmer programs, and regional non-profits. We will work closely with beginning farmer programs to extend and enhance their training by identifying mentor farmers and increasing awareness of the contract grazing business model. We will build on the existing Wisconsin Grazing Broker project, which seeks to establish a professional role similar to the private consulting forester. The grazing broker assists landowners in assessing the grassland resource and connects them to livestock producers and other resources (such as EQIP funding for fencing and watering facilities). Whether grant funded or on a fee-basis, establishment of a grazing broker role could contribute to extending the impacts of this project beyond its duration.

Activities planned include conducting research to fill information gaps (survey of non-farming landowners), traditional educational activities such as landowner workshops and contract grazing conferences, and facilitation of mentoring relationships and relationships building processes such as ‘speed dating’ meet-and-greet sessions that bring landowners and livestock farmers together. We plan to build into the project some level of flexibility so we can adapt our activities to the emerging needs of these audiences as we understand them better.

Evaluation Plan (150 words): currently 122

We will draw on the expertise of team members who are current or former Extension staff to develop a robust evaluation plan. Each of the groups targeted by this project will be evaluated individually to assess changes in

knowledge and behavior as a result of their participation. These evaluations will take the form of written or online surveys immediately following and several months after events. An end of project evaluation will capture medium term outcomes. In-depth interviews or focus groups will be used to evaluate impacts of mentoring arrangements and of landowner-livestock producer partnerships established as a result of the project. At least one case history of a successful landowner-livestock producer partnership for each of the three states will be compiled.

Outreach (150 words): currently 114

As an education project, the majority of the activities planned have a strong outreach focus. These include the contract grazing conference and the state level workshop series. In addition, we will create case histories of successful partnerships formed as a result of the project and document other outcomes and behavior changes. We will share these results through press releases, partner organization websites, and other media platforms. Included in our budget is travel support for partners to share information on the project at state level and regional conferences in the three states. Examples of these include the Wisconsin Grazing Conference, Minnesota’s Graze Fest, the Professional Farmers of Iowa Conference and others yet to be identified.

Estimated Budget

		Total SARE funds
Personnel		
1	Executive Director salary and fringe	\$6,455
	Bookkeeping salary and fringe	\$3,067
	Coordinator Salary	\$78,000
2	Fringe benefits	\$11,622
Subtotal		\$99,144
Non-Personnel		
3	Supplies	
	Supplies for workshops and conferences	\$1,000
	Cell phone for coordinator	\$2,880
4	Travel	
	Planning team travel	\$2,970
	Planning team travel to instate workshops	\$1,485
	Conference speaker travel (contract graziers)	\$6,000
5	Publications, websites	\$9,500
6	Computer, Equipment	\$1,000
7	Other direct costs (list)	
	Farmer mentor honoraria	\$6,000
	Conference meeting rooms	\$2,000
	Conference meals-to offset registration costs	\$4,000
	Workshop meeting rooms	\$900
	Workshop meals	\$2,700
	Postage, mailing	\$1,000
	Copying, printing	\$1,000

	Subcontract-Landowner survey	\$30,000
	Subcontract-Land Stewardship Project	\$9,000
Subtotal		\$81,435
Total Direct Costs		\$180,579
Indirect Costs (10% of total funds)		\$18,058
Grand total		\$198,637

Budget Narrative (500 words): currently 492

Personnel: We have budgeted for a half-time regional coordinator housed at Southwest Badger RC&D (\$25/hour + 14.9% fringe benefits (FB)). For a multi-state project, dedicated staff time is needed to maintain coordination among the partners. The coordinator will be responsible for managing partner communications, providing support and training for each state’s workshop series, for all logistics associated with the regional conference, and for carrying out evaluations planned by the team. Additional Southwest Badger personnel costs include five hours per month each for the Executive Director for grant oversight (\$35.86/hour salary and FB) and the accountant for fiscal management (\$17.04/hour salary and FB).

Supplies: Supply costs include a cell phone for the coordinator at \$80/month for 36 months, and \$1000 for supplies for the conference and workshops (paper, pens, nametags, flipcharts, markers, etc.).

Travel: \$4455 for team travel to planning team meetings (one per year), the regional conference, and instate workshops. This was requested by team members who have increasingly limited travel budgets. We have also budgeted \$6000 for speaker travel for up to three farmer presenters for the conference.

Publications, websites: Team member Jane Jewett has web design expertise and has estimated that it will cost \$7500 to design our land connection website and \$1000 per year for maintenance for the two subsequent years.

Computer, Equipment: \$1000 for a laptop computer for the coordinator.

Other Direct Costs:

Farmer mentor honoraria: \$500/farmer/year for two years, two farmers in each of the three states, total of \$6000.

Conference and workshop costs:

We have budgeted \$9600 for meeting rooms and meals to keep conference and workshop registration low or free of charge. Incorporating meals into workshop schedules creates an effective setting for networking, a primary goal for the project.

Meeting rooms: \$2000 for conference meeting rooms, \$900 for workshop meeting rooms (\$100 x 3 workshops x 3 states), total of \$2900.

Conference and workshop meals: For conference, 4 meals x \$13/meal x 100 participants = \$4000; for workshops, \$10/meal x 3 workshops x 30 participants x 3 states = \$2700, total of \$6700.

Postage and copying: \$1000 each for mailings and copying. Identifying and reaching out to non-farming landowners may involve direct mailings. For the Wisconsin grazing broker project, we did a mailing to more than 1000 landowners with expiring CRP contracts. We may need to do similar mailings for this project.

Subcontract for landowner research and survey: We have two potential groups to conduct the landowner research and survey: Renewing the Countryside in Minnesota or the Aldo Leopold Foundation in Wisconsin. Jan Joannides of Renewing the Countryside gave us the estimate of \$30,000.

Subcontract for Land Stewardship Project: As a non-profit, Land Stewardship Project requested \$4500 for staff to carry out the landowner workshops in two watersheds in Minnesota and \$4500 for their Farm Beginnings staff to assist with the farmer mentor program.

Indirect costs (up to 10%): Southwest Badger's usual indirect cost is 20%. For this project, they accept 10% or \$18,058.

Experience and Roles (500 words): currently at 498

Project Coordinator:

Laura Paine, Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, has over 20 years' experience doing outreach, research and education in managed grazing including coordinating interdisciplinary research and education programs and market development. She is a grass-fed beef producer and direct marketer with first-hand experience with pasture livestock production and marketing. Laura will be the coordinator of the project, providing organization, structure, and budgetary management, and facilitating communication among participants.

Major Participants:

Southwest Badger RC&D (SWB) will serve as institutional sponsor for the project. SWB is an incubator for innovative, economic, and sustainable use of local resources in southwestern Wisconsin. Executive Director Cara Carper has background in Extension Community, Natural Resource, and Economic Development programming and degrees in communications and journalism. Cara will manage the budget and work with Paine to coordinate the project.

Collaborators:

Iowa State University (ISU): Joe Sellers, Extension Beef Specialist for 26 years, will represent Iowa on the project team, recruiting cooperating mentors, young farmers, and landowners. He will deliver the Iowa workshop series. Joe's projects include "Custom Grazing in Iowa" and "Managing Grazing Lands for Multiple Uses, including Wildlife Habitat and Beef Production". The ISU Beginning and Young Livestock Producer Network and Beginning Farmer Center will participate.

Practical Farmers of Iowa (PFI): Luke Gran, Next Generation Coordinator at PFI, will provide communication through regular monthly email updates to 1500+ members. Luke manages www.findafarmer.net to help network beginning farmers with land access opportunities.

University of Minnesota (UM): Jim Paulson, University of MN Extension Dairy Educator, represents UM on the management team. Jim focuses on issues of sustainability in cattle production including utilizing high forage based systems and grazing.

Land Stewardship Project (LSP): Terry VanDerPol will represent LSP on the management team and share her experience on grazing management, contract grazing and working with non-operating landowners. Staff will identify and recruit non-operating landowners and farmers and will sponsor the workshop series in two Minnesota watersheds. Farm Beginnings program staff will identify beginning farmers.

Green Lands Blue Waters Partnership (GLBW): Jane Jewett will represent GLBW on the management team. Her work includes website development and management, workshop coordination, and writing and editing

publications. She operates a small, diversified livestock farm near Palisade, MN and is a meat vendor at the Grand Rapids Farmers' Market.

WI Grass-fed Beef Coop, Greg Nowicki, President, is a 90+ member marketing cooperative marketing their 'Wisconsin Meadows' brand grass-fed beef in Wisconsin and Chicago. The coop supports the project and will contribute expertise on educational programs, publicize events, and help identify farmer mentors.

Thousand Hills Cattle Company president Todd Churchill supports the project and will contribute his expertise on educational programs, help publicize activities, and help identify farmer mentors and beginning farmers from his extensive connections in the livestock industry.

University of Wisconsin School for Beginning Dairy and Livestock Farmers (WSBDF): Dick Cates will serve on the project team. As director of the Wisconsin School for Beginning Dairy and Livestock Farmers, Dick will incorporate contract grazing information into WSBDF trainings and will assist with regional workshops.

Farmer/Rancher involvement and compensation:

One of our primary activities will be establishment of a farmer mentor program which will compensate experienced farmers for providing training to beginning farmers. We have budgeted \$500 per year for two years for each of six farmer mentors. Our budget also includes \$9600 to cover most expenses for the conference and workshops, so that registration costs can be kept low. One or more of the conference speakers will be farmers. We plan to invite Bill Sproul, a contract grazer from southern Kansas to speak. As partners, Greg Nowicki, president of the Wisconsin Grass-Fed Beef Coop and Todd Churchill, president of Thousand Hills Cattle Company bring a strong farmer voice to the project. Several of our team members are farmers themselves including Jane Jewett, Laura Paine, Dick Cates, and Terry Van Der Poll, who are all beef producers.

Statement about use of Genetically Engineered Organisms or controversial technologies:

No GMOs or controversial technologies will be used.

Past, Current, and Pending SARE projects:

Pending: 2013 SARE-PDP application submitted by Green Lands Blue Waters: Increased Adoption of Continuous Living Cover (CLC) Farming Systems through Professional Development. Jewett is a Major Participant, Paine, Sellers, and Van Der Pol are involved as collaborators.

ENC10-119

Making pasture walks more than just a walk in the pasture. Professional Development Program. Laura Paine, Project Coordinator. Current, end date is December 31, 2014.

LNC08-303

Working with Farmers, Dairy Processors and Chefs to Build a Market for Grass-Fed Milk. Research and Education Project. Laura Paine, Project Coordinator. Completed, 2012.

LNC07-289

Grass-fed and Organic Beef: Production Cost and Profit Potential. Research and Education Project. Margaret Smith, ISU, Project Coordinator. Laura Paine, Major Participant. Completed, 2011.

ENC06-091

Organic Dairy Short Course for Ag Professionals. PDP program. Meg Moynihan, MN Department of Agriculture, Project Coordinator. Laura Paine, Major Participant. Completed, 2009.

Collaborator projects:

FNC12-860

Finishing Time And Weights Of Grass-Fed Beef Animals. Farmer/Rancher project. Jewett, Project Coordinator. On-going.

ENC10-114

Sustainable Poultry, Pastures, Soils, and Vegetable Education in Minnesota. Professional Development Program. Jim Paulson, Collaborator. Completed, 2012.

LNC95-088

Training and Transitioning New Farmers: A Practical Experiment in Farmer Self-Development and Institutional Reinvention. Research and Education Project. Dick Cates, Project Manager

LNC05-254

The Wisconsin School for Beginning Dairy Farmers Program - the First Ten Years: A Graduate Follow-up Survey and Beginning Dairy Farmer Case Studies. Research and Education Project. Dick Cates, Project Manager.

Statement regarding resubmitted ideas:

Not applicable.