

Midwest Perennial Forage Working Group
Conference call, 01/25/2016

Present:

Gene Schriefer
Meghan Filbert
Laura Paine
Kent Solberg
Doug Gucker
Wayne Monsen
Terry VanDerPol
Vance Haugen
Jane Jewett
Warren King

Updates:

Terry – LSP is bringing Greg Judy to western MN in mid-March.

Laura – There was an excellent speaker about contract grazing from Alberta at the recent GrassWorks conference; may be potential to bring him back in the future. <http://grassworks.org/?110340>. The Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship received a SARE-PDP grant. Most funding from that will go to GrassWorks for partnering with RC & Ds and the NRCS in Wisconsin to deliver training on soil health in pastures.

Meghan – The Practical Farmers of Iowa conference this year was combined with the Iowa Forage & Grassland Council conference, <http://iowaforage.org/>; which boosted attendance at that Forage & Grassland conference. <http://practicalfarmers.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/2016-Conference-Brochure-back-cover-moved-1.pdf>. Speakers covered regenerative grazing and lamb production, among other topics. PFI is working on a grazing fact sheet series and eight on-farm research studies on grazing of cover crops.

Kent – Gave a presentation at the MN Organic Conference about integrating cover crops and livestock. Sustainable Farming Association is developing an “ecological livestock network;” at the moment, it’s focused on goats but will expand to other livestock types. The SFA annual conference coming up Feb. 13 will include three sessions on grazing livestock; <http://www.sfa-mn.org/conference/>. The Midwest Soil Health summit in mid-February includes sessions on grazing for soil health; <http://www.sfa-mn.org/midwest-soil-health-summit/>.

Wayne – Kent covered it.

Doug – Illinois Forage Institute conference coming up at the U of I Carbondale research farm in mid-February, sponsored by Illinois Forage & Grassland Council: <http://www.illinoisforage.org/>

Gene – March 2, Northwest Illinois grazing conference:

<https://web.extension.illinois.edu/registration/?RegistrationID=13728>

March 3, Southwest Wisconsin Farmer Innovation meeting – focus on cover crops

March 16, spring grazing conference

Vance – Presented on dairy grazing in the Midwest at the Practical Farmers of Iowa conference. Will be meeting soon with the Great River Graziers to plan the summer pasture walk schedule.

Jane – Presented on grass-fed beef SARE Farmer/Rancher grant project at the Practical Farmers of Iowa conference; have been working on documents for MPFWG.

Overview of MPFWG's situation:

- Jane has been doing coordinating tasks for MPFWG as part of her position with GLBW; but she has now moved out of GLBW and is full-time for MISA (Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture). The new person hired by GLBW, Aaron Reser, will be focusing on the GLBW Watershed Initiative and administrative tasks. GLBW is willing to fund Jane's continued staffing of MPFWG through a contract with MISA.
- MPFWG has a 6-month, approximately January – June of 2016, budget and MOU written up that is awaiting signatures from Richard, MISA, and the MPFWG co-chairs. This will pay for about 4 hours/week of staff time, split between the co-chairs (\$500 each) and Jane
 - The 6-month budget will cover coordinating tasks for working group meetings, website work, and some work on projects identified by the group.
- There is \$2,500 available in program dollars, which could pay travel costs for members to participate in an in-person meeting.
- The MOU and budget will need to be re-worked after that six-month period, in conjunction with new funding coming in to GLBW and a new fiscal year (July 1-June 30) at the U of MN.
- Richard Warner is willing to include MPFWG budget requests in his larger funding request to Walton Foundation and McKnight Foundation, the two major donors to GLBW.
 - We'll need to have a MPFWG workplan and budget put together by mid-March for Richard's funding request submission in early April.

Option for a Major Project: Host the next GLBW Conference

- The 2015 GLBW conference in Minneapolis pointed toward integration of livestock into cropping systems as an important way to advance the 5 continuous living cover strategies (agroforestry, biomass, cover crops, perennial forage, perennial grain).
- A couple of years ago, Southwest Badger discussed with GLBW the possibility of hosting the 2016 conference with a focus on grazing. Since then, Laura Paine and Cara Carper have left SW Badger and the idea of hosting the conference probably left with them.

- Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems (CIAS) at UW-Madison is interested in co-hosting the conference. They are developing a major theme of perennialization in their work and have people involved in agroforestry, especially silvopasture.
- MPFWG could put co-hosting of the conference into its funding request for GLBW, as a major project for the group.
 - Richard Warner is willing to consider this for inclusion in the funding request, but would need to see a fairly detailed plan that would hit some GLBW goals.
 - The plan would need to include some intentional involvement of or outreach to grazing interests in Iowa, Illinois, and Indiana.
 - There would need to be some deliverables coming out of the conference – not just the holding of a conference.
 - Funds would be sought to hire a conference coordinator to manage the details. Laura will also talk with CIAS about their capacity to supply some staff time.
- GLBW would not require that the next conference be held in fall of 2016; it could be later. GLBW has intentionally avoided calling it an “annual” conference. However, momentum could be lost if the timeline stretches out.

Other Projects in the Works:

- Grazing Educator Network: Warren King is convening discussions on this, with a goal of submitting a SARE-PDP grant application in mid-March. The next conference call is scheduled for February 3 at 8:00 am.
- A proposed research project on grazing of Intermediate Wheatgrass (otherwise known as the perennial grain, Kernza™) was submitted to the SARE-R&E program and has advanced from the preproposal to full proposal stage. The full proposal will be due in April. Let Laura know if you want to become involved. Participants in that project include:
 - Valentin Picasso, UW-Madison (PI)
 - Craig Sheaffer, U of MN
 - Jake Jungers, U of MN
 - Lee DeHaan, The Land Institute
 - Rhonda Gildersleeve, UW Extension
 - Laura Paine, Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship
 - Gene Schriefer, UW Extension
 - 2 Minnesota farmers

Review of Potential Projects from April 2015, Decorah meeting notes

- Contract grazing. We could tie this into the conference theme. It comes up frequently as a way to deal with crop farmers who want to have perennial forage or cover crops but don't want to own or manage livestock.
 - Useful items: Examples, written materials, videos.

- This fits well with the idea of livestock as an integrating principle for increasing the amount of continuous living cover.
 - There is interest in contract grazing in central Illinois (and other heavily row-cropped areas), but no idea how to make it work.
 - Potentially a good avenue for beginning farmers to get started.
 - Development of a toolkit to advance contract grazing could be a deliverable associated with a GLBW conference.
- Road show. Development of materials and a traveling presentation that could go to lots of existing conferences.
 - Contract grazing could be all or part of the subject matter.
 - The road show would be a culmination of development of fact sheets, other materials.
 - Would be a good way to get the word out about MPFWG and about options for integrating livestock.
 - Could help with developing connections to more conventional agricultural groups: Corn Growers Association, Cattlemen's Association, etc.

Next Steps:

- Develop a workplan. This needs to be in fairly final form by mid-March for inclusion in Richard Warner's next funding request.
 - Doug Gucker, Kent Solberg, and Warren King volunteered to help with this.
 - All other MPFWG are invited to participate as well. Let Jane know ASAP ...
 - ... because, we'll set up a conference call very soon to get this ball rolling.
 - The workplan development group will decide if an in-person meeting is needed to work on the plan.
- Schedule a larger-group in-person meeting to begin work on a major project, once the workplan group gets that figured out; therefore the meeting will need to be in the second half of March, April, or May. Doodle poll will go out soon.