

Midwest Perennial Forage Working Group

Conference call, January 10, 2017

Present:

Caroline Van Schaik
Gene Schriefer
Laura Paine
Kent Solberg
Meghan Filbert
Tom Gervais
Terry VanDerPol
Jim Paulson
Dick Cates
Doug Gucker
Vance Haugen

Round-Robin Updates

Terry VanDerPol

Andy Marcum moved to Oregon; had an opportunity too good to pass up. LSP is now hiring to replace him. We have a project to reach out to bankers with the Cropping System Calculator. There was lots of interest from area farmers, and lots of comments that they wished their banker could see it. There have been some good workshops on soil health. There's an initiative for a goal of 1% organic matter increase in all soils in Pope County; LSP is deciding whether to join it.

Meghan Filbert

Practical Farmers of Iowa has been holding meetings of their on-farm collaborators. They are having lots of discussion of integration of soil health in their livestock sessions. Pasture monitoring work includes looking at pasture as bird habitat. The fact sheets on herbicides and grazing of cover crops went over very well at a field day in November. The PFI annual conference is coming up next week, and more promotion of the herbicide fact sheets will be done after the conference.

Dick Cates

Son and daughter-in-law moved back to join in the farm business. Dick's son is a grazer with contracts secured through the Grazing Broker program; he does not own livestock or land. Dick presented at the GLBW Conference, including a video of the visit by Louisiana shrimpers and fishermen to farms in the Lowery Creek watershed. This video is available online; link on the GLBW Conference website. The film was made with NRCS funding. There is a trip planned for the farmers to make a reciprocal visit to Louisiana.

Caroline Van Schaik

Four farm field days were held at the end of September as part of a Haney soil health test project. LSP's annual winter cover crop meeting is an opportunity for farmer-to-farmer education. Some U of MN Extension educators were present. Extension educators have now gone public with their skepticism of

the Haney test; there's an article on the U of MN Extension's new soils web page. The U of MN paper compared Haney test on 6" of soil depth to U of MN test on 24" of soil depth; this is really an apples-to-oranges comparison. Work in Nebraska showed that Haney does very well at predicting N, but is not great at P and K. Caroline's take is that the Haney test is unlocking some soil information that has been mysterious – soil fractions other than mineral macronutrients or micronutrients. It can teach us some things about biological activity, and it's okay that it isn't complete or perfect. It allows us to talk about biology of the soil. The Haney project has been a great teaching and discussion tool, a great conversation piece. Soil health discussions are coming up over the winter with Rick Bieber and Kristine Nichols. LSP can account for cropping system changes on 6,000 acres in the Root River watershed that are showing a positive impact on water quality. A bigger deal than the acres themselves is the methodology developed for counting those acres. Caroline will soon be un-funded in her work for Land Stewardship Project. A proposal to a foundation for continued funding for her work was not accepted. She will stay on at LSP for approximately three months or less if she finds another job.

Vance Haugen

Extension Service in Wisconsin is undergoing changes and Vance's position is in limbo, but he was told to plan for the entire 2017 year so he has scheduled pasture walks and reserved a World Dairy Expo booth.

Tom Gervais

Within MN NRCS there have been recent staffing changes in the grazing team. We're down to 2.5 FTEs out of historically 5 regional grazing specialists. John Zinn retired, and the person in NW MN moved to North Dakota. The remaining grazing specialists are trying to keep up with demand. Tom is currently the acting state grazing specialist, and the two other regional specialists are Jeff Duchesne and Lance Smith. There are organizational changes within MN NRCS as well; Tom is uncertain of their future ability to provide technical support. Right now there is a heavy workload related to the Farm Bill. They are updating practice implementation guides.

Doug Gucker

Expecting changes in U of IL Extension staffing within the year. He really likes the two fact sheets on herbicides and grazing cover crops. Cover crops are some cover, even if it's not perennial cover.

Kent Solberg

Dealing with lots of snow and cold. Working on lots of workshops and a conference with the Crow Wing River Forage Council on January 24. Troy Salzer and Abe Mach from Carlton County, MN (south of Duluth) will be presenting. The Sustainable Farming Association conference in February will include a session on goat grazing for control of invasives as well as a session on fencing. The Soil Health Summit also coming up in February will have a panel discussion of the Haney test. It will include U of MN scientists Carl Rosen (soils) and Julie Grossman (horticulture). Kelly Anderson at MDA, Jeff Duchesne with NRCS, and Kent are working on a grazing website that will be like an online speed-dating service to match graziers with available cropland. It will be launched at the Minnesota Organic Conference. They are including the MPFWG website as a major link.

Laura Paine

The GrassWorks Conference is coming up and features three main tracks over three days: beginning farmer/rancher, dairy, and mixed livestock. The mixed livestock track includes sessions on pastured pork. Larry Tranel and Jim Gerrish will keynote. The first GrassWorks conference was 25 years ago and organized by Allen Nation, who was going to keynote at the conference but he died suddenly in early November. Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship is growing rapidly. It's in WI, MN, IA and MO; and is expanding now in PA, NY, and New England states. Farmers, organizations, and universities all want to be part of the program. DGA has a small staff and we're scrambling to cover all these states.

Jim Paulson

Employment has ended with U of MN Extension and he's transitioning to other work.

Gene Schriefer

Gene will be giving two presentations at the GrassWorks conference: managing for parasite resistance, and turning corn & bean ground back to grazing. The 5th Annual Driftless Beef Conference is also coming up; Gene is on the planning committee. It has grown every year; last year had 180 producers attend. It's focused on beef production. Gene is working with the Wisconsin Meadows beef co-op, which will have its annual meeting in February. The co-op is doing better than previously. It may surpass \$2 million in sales this year. Spring pasture walks are getting organized; he'll post those when the list is ready.

Jane Jewett

Most of her work was planning for the MPFWG session at the GLBW conference in Columbia, MO and attending and facilitating the session. It went extremely well and was very well-received by those who attended. Diomy Zamora and Diane Mayerfeld co-led a silvopasture presentation, which included a segment by Tyler Carlson, a beef producer in the Alexandria, MN area who is incorporating silvopasture into his grazing system. Laura had arranged for Max Alleger from the MO Conservation Agency to present; he did a fantastic job also on grazing to meet conservation goals. The web pages from the 2016 Conference are up, including a page for the Perennial Forage session. MISA's Information Exchange has a small pot of money available that we are going to assign to finishing the slide library.

Herbicide fact sheets – update by Meghan:

We wound up with separate fact sheets for corn and soybean, with some overlap of herbicides. We added a column for planting restrictions in addition to grazing restrictions, so they are more of a one stop shop for information about cover crop interactions with corn & bean herbicides; and did our best to make them intuitive. We worked with an Iowa State University weed expert to double-check the information. So far we have not received any questions about herbicides that weren't included on the list. These fact sheets put a spotlight on the issue of needing to read the label and be concerned about whether your herbicide will work with cover crop grazing. These fact sheets will get back to industry to start the conversation about how product labels are presented. Grazing information should be more prominent on the label. There is also a need for more herbicides that are labeled for grazing.

The fact sheets are timely since there are several relevant conferences coming up. Gene sent the fact sheets to Heidi Johnson who is working on cover crop grazing in Wisconsin. The fact sheets will be in packets at the SFA's Soil Health Summit; LSP will have them at Rick Bieber's soil health workshop; Gene

will print and bring them to the Driftless Beef Conference; and they can be in the CIAS booth at the GrassWorks Conference.

GLBW Conference – Jane walked the group through the online session pages.

ERME Proposal

The group submitted a grant proposal for dairy case studies, based on a suggestion Kent made on the October conference call. The project would take a look at the financials of dairy farms that incorporate some level of grazing, and feed those numbers into a calculator based on LSP's Cropping System Calculator to provide farmers with estimates of feed costs they could reduce by using grazing. DGA is the PI on the proposal. DGA has a case study contractor they work with who can do the interviews and writing.

Website

Ways to boost recognition and use? Suggestion to contact Maggie Frasier in Extension to compare our site usage with some Extension websites. We do see a small spike in visits to the site after each Update goes out.

Steering Committee Update

Richard Warner is getting more requests for information and from people wanting to join GLBW from farther away – Tennessee, for example. The Steering Committee is discussing how to come up with a better structure that allows growth of the organization with limited funds and staff. There is more effort toward consciously tying together Continuous Living Cover and soil health. Three main questions are before the Steering Committee: 1) What should we do to affect acreage in CLC; 2) What needs to come back to the Farm Bill; 3) What role do we have in supply chain issues? The Kernza supply chain is starting to form; do we want to have an overt role in that?

GLBW Funding/Foundations

GLBW is having conversations with 11th Hour Foundation and the Carolyn Foundation, both of which are committed to transformational change. How might the MPFWG fit into a proposal?

- Demonstrate aspects of a really dramatic transformational change. It's exciting to contemplate the dual use of Kernza for feed and forage.
- Kernza is a really good fit for connecting this group to GLBW initiatives. Some of our members are already involved with the project led by Valentin Picasso at UW-Madison.
 - Might the foundations fund some regional work so that all MPFWG members could participate with Kernza research & outreach?
- Craig Sheaffer is doing the agronomic work under the SARE R & E grant; figuring out timing of Kernza forage harvest that would allow harvest of a grain crop in same year.

April In-Person Meeting

- Need to reschedule; Jane will send out Doodle poll for last ½ March and early April
- Topics to discuss:

- ERME grant
- Value Chain/Supply Chain work
- Kernza; possibly bring in Craig Sheaffer or Don Wyse as a speaker
- Update on the grazier/cropland website that Kent is working on
- Demo of LSP's Cropping System Calculator
 - Rebecca Wasserman-Olin, or Caroline, or Jim?