

Midwest Perennial Forage Working Group
conference call, 4/29/14

Present on call:

Laura Paine (co-chair)
Terry VanDerPol (co-chair)
Cara Carper
Margaret Dunn
James Paulson
David Rosmann
Dean Thomas
Kent Solberg
Steve John
Tom Quinn
Dick Cates
Nadia Alber

Laura Paine reviewed the group's history: began with some less-formal meetings about three years ago; became more formal with in-person meetings about once a year. The contract grazing series of four fact sheets were created by this group last year. The group held a session at the GLBW Conference in Minneapolis in November 2013. Discussion and "voting" on topics at that session resulted in several topics flagged as high-priority or of particular interest:

- Matchmaking of graziers and landowners for contract grazing
- Education of non-operating landowners
- Soil-animal-human-environmental health connection
- On-farm research

Discussion of how folks on today's call view their connection to this group or its past work:

David R. – Always hand out the Contract Grazing fact sheets at workshops; they are a handy tool

Kent S. – Education on the value of grazing is important; definitely sees a role for education of non-farm landowners.

Margaret D. – Practical Farmers of Iowa's work is a venue for matchmaking, but they are not actively brokering those relationships.

Steve J. – His organization (Agricultural Watersheds Institute, Decatur, IL) is particularly interested in warm-season grasses, which could have a dual role for grazing or biofuel.

SARE R & E Proposal

Laura described the SARE R & E proposal that she submitted from this group. It did not pass its first review and we were not invited to submit a full proposal (note: 139 proposals were submitted, 28 invited to send a full proposal, and 8 of those were recommended for funding, so <6% success rate). Input from the review team about the proposal:

- Potential relevance, but relied too heavily on grant funding to make it work. They wanted to see sustainable funding.
- Wanted to see transition of marginal row-crop land into grazing
- Liked the strong team that was put together

Terry V. commented that this brokering idea is pretty new. There are regions where contract grazing isn't well-known. The broker role may be less necessary if contract grazing is well-known in a region, so this grant project wouldn't necessarily have been something that needed to be funded forever. It could have been more of an introduction of the contract grazing concept.

Jane J. also noted Joan Stockinger's presentation from the Nov. conference about developing a sustainable land management profession to work with non-operating landowners; the grazing broker roll could be part of that new profession.

Steve J. described a pilot project he's working with in Illinois to pair up a grain farmer and a forage farmer to share management of a leased land parcel: the grain farmer takes care of the flat land, the forage farmer takes care of the sloping or highly-erodible land. Discussion of this; there is a contract to specify responsibilities; the hay producer does the annual fertility maintenance of the forage ground.

Agreed that we will re-submit the grant proposal. Laura will revise it and send around for comments; send any thoughts or ideas to Laura.

Discussion of what constitutes progress or what folks need to get back in order to participate in GLBW:

Jane reviewed the GLBW strategic planning process. GLBW currently has McKnight Foundation and Walton Family Foundation money that needs to be used for organization, networking, organizational support types of activities.

- Measurement of progress would be:
 - Getting actual projects underway
 - Working with farmers
 - Collecting results
 - Being able to write fact sheets
 - Being able to pull information generated from the above points into presentations
- Need for funding for practices: cost-share is needed to help farmers do things.
- Research; especially on-farm research. Some of us work with really innovative farmers; do we ever sit down and ask what they need?

- Need \$ for staff time to support work with farmers
- GLBW is a regional project – appreciate the opportunity to network with others in other states, bounce ideas around
- PFI has good in-house communications staff so help with communications is not needed.

Discussion of cost-sharing under EQIP:

Dean Thomas described the situation with EQIP. There has been a change so that partial payment can't be made for partial work anymore. This has created a lot of red tape and it's hard to get farmers to participate; and in fact he's not recommending EQIP to farmers anymore because it is so difficult.

- WI, MI, and MN are together in a region under NRCS.
- NRCS rules are coming down from the federal level.
- It used to be that a farmer could enter a contract for, say, fencing and watering systems for rotational grazing. The contract could go by line-items: completion of X feet of fence or X feet of watering system would allow the farmer to have that checked and verified, and then get paid for that portion of the project. The farmer didn't have to lay out so much money up-front.
- Now, that's changed. Now everything has to be paid for up front and completed within the time frame specified in the contract. If there are delays in completion, the farmer may not get paid at all. Payment of everything up front by the farmer is very difficult -- some of these systems require thousands of dollars to implement.

Further discussion of the need to address this EQIP issue. The policy has to be addressed before very many farmers are going to be able to work with this program. Suggestion by Laura to reach out to Warren King with the Pasture Project at the Wallace Center. They have a relationship with NRCS at the national level. This may be a way to use the GLBW "lever" to address a policy problem.

GLBW's SARE-PDP grant: "Integrating Continuous Living Cover into farming systems through professional development." Discussion of the concept of using multiple CLC practices; interest in involvement from several on the call. Jane will send out updates and keep this group "in the loop."

Discussion of other things that the GLBW central office and/or Steering Committee could do to help support what Working Group members are doing (has to be organizing/networking/support types of things):

- Suggestion for compiling and making available farmer case studies; also doing some updating if the case studies are out-of-date. Having examples of real farmers doing these practices is very important.
- Create a simple way to for someone to make connections with others working on similar things – especially to foster collaboration on grants.

Discussion of meeting schedule for the Midwest Perennial Forage Working Group.

- Laura P. will send out a Doodle poll for preliminary scheduling of quarterly conference calls
- Steve J. described the planned November 2014 conference in Decatur, IL. This will have an emphasis on biomass, grown for forage as well as for fuel, and have a tie-in to watersheds. The Forage group could meet in person there.
- Jane can set up a review session for the SARE R & E grant