

Midwest Perennial Forage Working Group
July 6, 2016
Conference Call

Present:

Laura Paine -- Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship (DGA)
Terry VanDerPol – Land Stewardship Project (LSP)
Jane Jewett – Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (U of MN)
Dick Cates – Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems (UW)
Kent Solberg – Sustainable Farming Association of MN (SFA)
Doug Gucker – University of Illinois Extension
Meghan Filbert – Practical Farmers of Iowa (PFI)
Molly Meyers – Glacierland RC & D (WI)
Gene Schriefer – University of Wisconsin Extension
Jim Paulson – University of Minnesota Extension
Caroline Van Schaik – Land Stewardship Project

Sharing of Updates:

Dick Cates – A group met to discuss the 2017 GLBW Conference. Pam Porter from CIAS at UW-Madison is taking the lead on conference planning. Laura Paine, Richard Warner, Dick Cates, and Gene Schriefer were all present at that meeting. Part of the task now is to figure out whether a general theme of integrating livestock in cropping systems will work, or if that's too wide a net.

Terry VanDerPol – LSP's cropping decision-maker tool has been rolled out in the Chippewa River watershed in western MN and is proving to be powerful. Farmers have commented that they wished their banker knew about this – so LSP is working on outreach to bankers. LSP is also working on funding a grazing specialist to focus on grazing of public lands, in collaboration with the US Fish & Wildlife Service. They may also get TNC on board. More compromise will be needed from all sides – landowners, livestock owners, DNR, and hunters in order to make progress.

Caroline Van Schaik – SFA, PFI Pasture Project, and LSP were all involved in an event at the end of May on Olaf Haugen's farm. There was a classroom and a field component about integrating cows and grazing into cover crops and perennial cover. Allen Williams spoke. A powerful aspect of the event was giving people the opportunity to try the tools of pasture management – a selection of forage and soil measurement tools were set out for people to pick up and try out. Altogether it was a fantastic partnership and a great day about cows, soil, grass, and sun. Caroline has been doing lease work with landowners and tenants, which has led to a new web page on the LSP website with conservation leasing resources. This includes MPFWG's Contract Grazing resources.

Meghan Filbert – PFI’s field day season is in full swing. Some of the field days deal with integration of livestock with cover crops and/or small grains. There were 75 people at a field day in SE Iowa at the end of June, where we looked at soil and roots under grazing. About 100 people attended a field day about roller-crimping of rye, so people are interested in these topics.

Jim Paulson – A field day is scheduled for August 11 in Eyota, MN involving MN Forage Council, U of MN Extension, Board of Soil and Water Resources, and others about alternative annual forages and cover crops interseeded into corn. Demonstration plots have been planted. This will show people ways to potentially add to the forage supply in a forage chain.

Doug Gucker – Illinois Forage & Grassland Council hosted the State Forage Expo (biggest forage show of the year) at the southern tip of Illinois. We toured a farm that is working with the Wallace Center on mob grazing. U of IL Extension is putting new emphasis on soil health, circling back to it after two decades to work that was done in the 1990s.

Kent Solberg – SFA held a two-day advanced grazing workshop with Allen Williams at the end of May. There was lots of interest. A field day is scheduled for October 14 in Otter Tail County, MN; looking at the results of seven years of bale grazing and use of warm-season plantings on former CRP acreage. Two field days are scheduled for August about integration of livestock into cover crop systems.

Jane Jewett – Spent a week in Missouri, with part of that time at the U of MO’s Horticultural and Agricultural Research Center in New Franklin, where a lot of agroforestry work is done. They are establishing silvopasture paddocks into a walnut orchard. Some work was done there a few years ago on shade for grazing livestock; they have data on animal performance with and without access to shade. The data were presented as conference proceedings but not otherwise distributed, so Jane may be able to acquire the data and create a fact sheet.

Gene Schriefer – Working on lining up farms to host pasture walks. A new local watershed group has asked Gene to work with them on grazing and nutrient management. There will be a field day on brush management in a working pasture. Gene has a project on application of cover crops in grazing systems and is looking at overseeding of cover crops into pasture. Another project is evaluating big bluestem in a 13-acre planting on his farm. He started grazing it last winter and took about 2.5 tons/acre of hay off in a first cutting this year. Some yield and quality data are available. Gene is involved now in delivering a professional grazing in-service for Extension, NRCS, and other professional ag advisors. This gets research-based information into the hands of people who work with farmers. This effort was previously led by Rhonda Gildersleeve.

Molly Meyers – Based in NE Wisconsin, in the Green Bay area. She currently has three affiliations: Glacierland RC & D, UW-Green Bay, and the Alliance for the Great Lakes. A contribution agreement with NRCS is just wrapping up. Large CAFO-type dairy

operations in the Green Bay area are switching to grazing for their replacement heifers. This is a new thing in the area so she's working on that and collecting economic and production data from farms, particularly during the transition year. A perennial forage and grazing field event is scheduled for Aug. 30 – Sept. 1. Public interest in agriculture is high; a local farm just offered its 5th annual family farm day and had 1400 attendees. Molly is involved in a new grant-funded project to get perennial forage – mainly alfalfa and cool-season grasses – planted into wet areas or into whole fields where there should be buffers if the field is row-cropped. She's working with a crop consultant and nutritionist for that project.

Laura Paine – Working for the DGA has pulled her away from doing pasture walks. She was involved in a MOSES “In Her Boots” field day for women farmers, which had a livestock focus. Laura gave a presentation about grass-fed beef. One of the other presentations was about a portable goat dairy (may not be legal in all places). The GrassWorks annual picnic/membership gathering will be held on a 100% grass-based dairy that is transitioning the next generation into the operation. She's involved in organizing the Wisconsin Grazing Conference which will be Feb. 2-4, 2017 in Wisconsin Dells. It will be the 25th Anniversary conference, and will feature Allen Nation and Jim Gerrish as speakers. (Allen Nation organized the first WI Grazing Conference.) Also Sarah Flack will speak on the art & science of managed grazing.

Presentation to Green Lands Blue Waters Steering Committee

The GLBW Steering Committee has requested a presentation from MPFWG. The Steering Committee meets mainly by phone every second Friday of the month. They have been asking the various committees of GLBW to join and present to the Steering Committee and answer questions about the group. It will be MPFWG's turn on July 15, although that could be rescheduled. Jim Paulson and Dick Cates volunteered to make the presentation.

MPFWG Group Structure & Function

We discussed having a “Core Group” of people who are typically present on calls and involved when questions or requests for comment go out via email. These will be the folks involved in guiding the group. There could be a larger group of interested people who might be involved in things more occasionally.

Question as to whether the Update in early June went out to the larger group, including last year's webinar participants. It didn't go to webinar participants, but future Updates should. Jane will need to check into getting that complete list of participants. Liz Ruiz took Robert McGill's place at the Pasture Project and Caroline offered to help Jane get in touch with Liz.

Discussion of change in co-chair. Jane had not looked at the vote tally and wanted to verify that Jim Paulson would still be interested in co-chairing if no funds are available to pay co-chairs. Jim said he would. The notice about voting will be re-sent, and MPFWG will move forward with the concept of the Core Group. Noted that Molly Meyers is welcome to join the Core Group if she's able to be that involved.

Funding

Richard Warner included MPFWG in the GLBW funding request to Walton Family Foundation, but GLBW did not get the increase requested from Walton. We are not aware of any specific feedback from Walton as to why the request was denied. Terry noted that Walton has changed its focus: it wants to see hard numbers and measurable outcomes as in change in acreage on the ground; and also is focusing on Indiana, Iowa, and Illinois. Their continued support for GLBW may be related to GLBW's work on Kernza, which is amenable to specific acreage reporting.

Discussion of funding options for the group:

- The measurable outcomes are going to be wanted by virtually any funder.
- Can we make the ecological and economic case for our work?
- We might fit into funding sources that GLBW as a whole doesn't fit
- Could we do our own writing of grant proposals? Jane can spend some staff time on putting proposals together.
- Granters are often favorable to regional work
- "Hunting as a pack" – which organizations in MPFWG have which expertise to fit into a proposal?
- MPFWG shouldn't compete with either GLBW or its own members: LSP, SFA, PFI
- Has anyone tried formally writing-in the MPFWG into their other grants?
 - Terry: has a little bit for regional collaboration in her grants.
- The mini-grant program might have momentum and be fundable
 - Some preference for securing funding for the group before the mini-grants
 - The mini-grant idea has deliverables attached, which makes it more attractive to a funder – could make a case for support for the mini-grants and then add on some \$ for travel, etc.

Priorities for MPFWG Funding:

- \$ for travel to in-person meetings
- \$ for travel, registration and lodging to the GLBW Conferences
- \$ for travel and meals for people involved in planning the 2017 Conference
- Jane's staff time and co-chair stipends

Searching for MPFWG Funding:

- Jane will look into potential funding sources
 - For mini-grants
 - For general operations
- Core Group to challenge ourselves to look at appropriate foundations; keep our eyes open for opportunities
- Consider approaching grazing infrastructure businesses, such as Premier Fence.
- Molly noted that we need a feel for where people are working – she’s working with funding sources that have an interest in the hypoxia situation in the Bay of Green Bay. Most others in the group are in the Upper Mississippi River Basin.

Cover Crop/Herbicide Fact Sheet

Meghan Filbert is taking the lead on creating a fact sheet about herbicide restrictions for crops that will be grazed. Existing fact sheets focus on planting restrictions, not grazing restrictions.

Kent Solberg, Gene Schriefer, Doug Gucker, and Meghan Filbert have all agreed to help with the development, so that involves MN, WI, IL, and IA. Lizabeth Stahl, Extension Educator from Worthington, MN is also offering some guidance.

The holdup now is finding someone to comb through the fine print on herbicide labels. We don’t need someone highly skilled; just someone who is a careful reader and can pay attention to detail. PFI might have a little bit of funding to pay someone to do this.

The resource should be comprehensive but also easy to scan; Meghan suggested 30 pesticides. There was a question about whether these would include herbicides only, or also fungicides and insecticides. It was agreed to try to get information about the top 10 herbicides, fungicides and insecticides used on corn and soybean in the 4-state area, and then several MPFWG members could each read a handful of those labels. Doug, Gene, Terry, Laura and Caroline all volunteered to read labels. Jane will work with Meghan on putting together an online data entry form for the label readers to use.

2016 GLBW Conference – Nov. 29 & 30 in Columbia, MO

The Center for Agroforestry at University of Missouri is hosting this conference. They are still in the early stages of planning, and no information is available yet on conference themes.

The topic preferred by the MPFWG for this fall’s conference is “Grazing for Control of Invasives.” Reasons why this is a good topic:

- Small capital investment to get started, so good for beginning farmers

- Small ruminants are non-threatening to the public
- Limited acreage required for off-season housing of animals
- Selling a service and a product, so multiple income streams
- Good for conservation of public lands; non-chemical method of control

MPFWG does have some funding for the conference session; probably about \$2,000. We could send our own members to the conference to be presenters. Number of people who could go depends on travel costs. It's about an 8-hour drive from St. Paul to Columbia.

2017 GLBW Conference – Hosted by CIAS

An initial planning meeting was held two weeks ago. The planning group will have the conference planned out by at least July of next year; maybe June. CIAS is looking for funding for an event coordinator.

Current staff priorities:

- record meeting notes
- communications with Core Group and wider group
- research on funding opportunities
- assist with project coordination for herbicide fact sheet

Next call: October 5, 8:30 am – 10:00 am