

Midwest Perennial Forage Working Group
Conference call, July 16, 2014

Present:

Margaret Dunn
Laura Paine
Caroline Van Shaik
Terry VanDerPol
David Rosmann
Kent Solberg
Nadia Alber
Joe Sellers
Richard Warner
Sadie Schroeder
Jane Jewett

Agenda:

- Share information about activities with an eye toward going forward as a working group
- SARE R & E Proposal
- GLBW Strategic Plan
- SARE-PDP workshop, Aug. 4

Information Sharing

Nadia Alber: The Wisconsin School for Beginning Dairy Farmers is beginning its 19th year. Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems (CIAS) has hired a perennialization coordinator and they want to pull together a statewide conference on perennial agriculture. This will be broad, including fruit crops. (Laura Paine suggested a meeting between CIAS and Richard Warner re: perennials).

Caroline Van Shaik: The Land Stewardship Project office in Lewiston, MN has a tiny exploratory program on custom grazing. We're talking to some people who are doing it and finding out what they think about how it works; and collecting that information on a spreadsheet. We want to submit a full RMA proposal this fall. Would like to piggy-back that on the SARE R & E proposal from this group: include an education component, one-on-one visits, development of materials, and workshops; would like to have Laura give a presentation. Also interested in crunching the numbers on leases, and facilitated landed/landless connections.

Terry VanDerPol: In the western part of MN we have two grazing groups. One is essentially a club of experienced graziers. The other is a group of about 12 recreational landowners and 7 farmers. The group is working with about 4200 acres of seriously degraded grazing land. The landowners are cost-sharing expenses and they are pooling four herds of cattle to move through these acres, pushing back

invasives. Also we had a community project to do a baseline documentation of the landscape: a “bio-blitz” that had about 50 people in teams for 10 hours to do inventory on every species they could find. It was a powerful event; getting people together to see what’s really happening on the land that they love created lots of positive energy. We’re having a field day/pasture walk; there are some producers gaining interest in managed grazing.

Margaret Dunn: Possibly her last MPFWG call; am getting married and shifting responsibilities over to a new person at Practical Farmers of Iowa. Currently waiting for producers to submit data from ongoing research projects. There are a couple of farmers trying warm-season cover crops, and we are seeing some very diverse cover crop mixes. Also we’re working on extending forage availability with cover crops, and connecting cover crops with graziers. Jim Gerrish will be in Iowa from Aug. 18-22, leading one or two field days per day during that week; it will be awesome!

David Rosmann: I’ll be leaving LSP and moving to Omaha soon. LSP is conducting a series of Holistic Land Management workshops in collaboration with PFI. One of these included a biological monitoring session led by Ralph Tate that was very well received; we looked at a “succotash” field above- and below-ground.

Kent Solberg: August 12 will be the Organic Dairy Day at Morris. August 14-15, Gearld Fry will be coming for two workshops on breeding cattle for grass-based production. In November there will be cover crop field days, focused on animal use of warm-season/late-season complex cover crop mixes. November 21 will be a soil health webinar led by Wendy Taheri, and the Soil Health Summit featuring Burleigh County, ND farmers will be Feb. 18-19 of 2015. We are seeing lots of emphasis on cover crops, particularly complex covers. These are a good bridge between row crops and perennial forage, and also can fill gaps in the forage chain; for example, the “summer slump” and late-fall forage declines.

Joe Sellers: As already mentioned, there will be a field day series led by Jim Gerrish. We have a beginner grazing training program called “Greenhorn Grazing” as well as a more advanced grazing series. We’re working on updating publications.

Laura Paine: We (Southwest Badger RC & D Council) is providing technical assistance in 1-on-1 work with landowners. We’re also offering technical assistance to the DNR and The Nature Conservancy where they are using managed grazing as a tool. TNC has about 1000 acres they are converting to grassland via managed grazing and patch-burn grazing. We’re offering field days to an audience of landowners – introduction to grasslands and the value of them in SW WI. We’re helping convert expired CRP land to managed grazing. On July 29 we’re organizing a pasture walk on conversion of CRP pine to grassland. We’re also working on developing a framework to offer Whole-Farm Planning and targeting non-farming landowners with that.

SARE R & E Proposal

Main activities:

- Regional contract grazing conference

- Workshop series (multi-state)

Reviewer comments on previously submitted proposal:

- Too heavy of a reliance on grant funding; they wanted to see a plan for sustainable financing of the Grazing Broker program
- Wanted to see transition of marginal cropland into perennial forage

Discussion of transition of marginal cropland:

- We can't promise numbers of acres – can we? Concern about that.
 - Contradiction from Terry VanDerPol: LSP is, in fact, promising numbers of acres in some of its grants and is delivering on those promises, but you have to really focus on those landowners with marginal cropland.
- Show profitability of grazing and making more opportunities for profitable grazing.
- There are areas of the world where custom-grazing is common and there are well-established relationships between landowners and graziers. This is not the case in MN, WI, and IA; we want to raise awareness of the models in these states.
- Are the workshops a weakness of the application?
 - Put together a basic framework and get state-based group(s) to develop the workshops further
 - Talk about building capacity of the state-based groups; that would also help address the sustainability of funding and effort.
- Potential to add a survey component to the proposal
 - There's a dearth of information about grazing contract rates and what contracts look like.
 - Could do multi-state surveys based on the survey work Caroline has been doing with LSP
 - But, maybe should not muddy the waters of a clearly Education-focused proposal with a Research component?
 - Could be framed as an effort to understand what's out there, rather than actual research.

Discussion of re-submission and who should take the lead:

- Agreement that it would be worthwhile to re-submit.
- Laura is willing to shepherd it, but would like one or two people per state to also put some time into it.
- If submitted through a University, they would take a hefty percentage off the top. SW Badger RC & D would also need to take some overhead to manage the grant. Discussion of this; it could be a good thing to build the capacity of the non-profits to work in this area. SW Badger has a track record of securing other grant funding to support the Grazing Broker project. Support for SW Badger to carry the grant.

- Timeframe is August through October to put this together. Terry VanDerPol (MN), Margaret Dunn (IA), and Nadia Alber (WI) will help.

GLBW Strategic Plan

Richard Warner: GLBW is working on a long-term strategic plan. We should have a copy more widely distributed by mid-August. The long-term objective is to get more continuous living cover (CLC) on the land. There are five parts to it; parts 1 through 3 focus on what GLBW participants are already doing and will do more of in the future. Components include:

- working with the business community to develop markets
- policy changes to support CLC
- research on development of new CLC crops through plant breeding
- research on development of cropping systems that include CLC
- collaboration with Working Groups (Midwest Perennial Forage Working Group, MPFWG; Mid American Agroforestry Working Group, MAAWG; Midwest Cover Crops Council, MCCC)
- collaboration with a developing Watershed Initiative
- the role of the GLBW Regional Office and Steering Committee
- framework for participation by partner organizations

SARE-PDP Grant, manual & workshops

The audience is farm advisors – NRCS, SWCD, watershed district staff, Extension educators, DNR, CCAs, co-op agronomists. The goal is to raise their comfort level with continuous living cover practices (perennial forage, agroforestry, and cover crops), so that they will recommend these practices to the farmers they work with.

In the one-day workshops Laura Paine will give a presentation on pasture/forage, Diomy Zamora will present on agroforestry, and Scotty Wells will present on cover crops. Matt Liebman and Matt Helmers from Iowa State University will present on CLC in crop rotations and CLC placement on the landscape.

Discussion of crop insurance – will someone be prepared to talk about that? Livestock producers with prevent-plant acres are refusing to plant covers. PFI has some crop insurance information.

Grazing of cover crops, economics – Margaret has some back-of-the-envelope information from a farmer.

The next quarterly conference call for MPFWG will be in September or October.