

## Midwest Perennial Forage Working Group

August 16, 2017 Conference Call

Present:

Laura Paine  
Jim Paulson  
Vance Haugen  
Kent Solberg  
Robert Bauer  
Pete Huff  
Jane Jewett

Updates:

Laura – Two big conferences in Madison, WI recently. Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship (DGA) had a poster and presentation at the Soil & Water Conservation Society conference. The American Farmland Trust (AFT) director spoke about aging farmers and the need for support for beginning farmers. AFT had moved away from work on farm succession but is getting back into it, and re-positioning itself to help with land trusts. National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition conference was the other one recently in Madison. Key takeaway: despite contention in Washington, D.C., the Farm Bill is usually bipartisan and may move forward.

Vance – The Pasture Walk series is rolling along. Robert Bauer was a guest speaker at one pasture walk and there was lots of interest. The 2018 World Dairy Expo is coming up, and Vance is passing along presentation duties to a colleague, Joel at Graze Partners, since the future of UW-Extension is uncertain.

Kent – Two “Dirt Rich” events were held in early August; attendance of 40 at one and about 25 at the other. These were in the classroom in the mornings and field in the afternoons. The NRCS rainfall simulator was brought out to the field, which was interesting – people could see in real-world conditions how management choices affect water infiltration. It was clear that relatively minor tweaks to cropping systems could greatly improve soil health. Presentations by Allen Williams are available as webinars online. District conservationists and others are looking for information and doing their own presentations to farmers and landowners. Farmers need to be accompanied and mentored in their early years of making management changes to improve soil health. Potential for partnership of DGA and SFA in this area.

Jim – There is a lot of really good value in these field days, pasture walks, etc. We need to keep holding up models of how to do good grazing; it’s an inexact science and there is lots of room for people to do better.

Pete – Introduced himself as the new Pasture Project (PP) program officer; trying to get PP back into the conversation around grazing. He’s getting up to speed on PP projects that are in various stages.

Robert – Continuing work on the USDA-NIFA funded grazing broker program originally started by Laura, working with PP and others in WI. A new website, [grazingbroker.org](http://grazingbroker.org), is in the beta-testing phase and Robert would appreciate feedback from MPFWG members. It’s similar to the matchmaker site in MN

that was developed by SFA, NRCS, and MDA. A grazing mentorship manual Robert developed is available as a resource. He's also working on a soil health knowledge & practice toolkit for conservation staff and educators, and is seeking input and chapters for that.

Jane – Primarily local food regulatory work, clarifying MN and federal regulations for production and sales of local food, and capturing that information in fact sheets. This work isn't directly pasture, livestock, or grazing; but it's foundational to local and regional food marketing systems.

Gene – Recent pastured poultry field day featuring guinea fowl; grazing guinea fowl looks to be financially viable. Looking at some on-farm research on alleviating compaction with grazing. Pasture walks are ongoing. Recently 140 people attended a program about grazing to improve water quality. A streambank soil core sampling project showed that in an 8' core, there was 6' of sediment deposited by the stream over time. Project is looking at flood damage mitigation with perennial forage.

Conference session planning

Draft agenda for the conference is available here:

[https://www.cias.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/GLBW.Program.Draft\\_.8.10.pdf](https://www.cias.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/GLBW.Program.Draft_.8.10.pdf)

Gene has joined about ½ of the conference session calls. Status of the planning:

- November 28<sup>th</sup> is a full day plus evening events.
- Keynote speakers are confirmed.
- Fundraising is ahead of schedule.
- More marketing of the conference is needed.

The MPFWG session is scheduled for the second day, Nov. 29, beginning at 9:30 AM. We have 2 hours.

Brainstorming ideas for the session:

- Examples of what partner organizations are doing that reflect the theme of integrating livestock with other practices, and that reflect MPFWG's collective work.
- DGA and contract grazing
- Showcase where we're working collaboratively; for example, the CIG project: features orgs working together, and the linking of cover crops and livestock. This PP/SFA/PFI/LSP collaboration is one of the longer-running ones; would be good to present.
  - This relates to the draft agenda; Agency/NGO Innovations on afternoon of Day 1. PP had been included on a preliminary list; we could request they get moved to the MPFWG session.
- Grazing Broker work (delete absentee landowner language, per Robert's request)
- Contract grazing on public & private lands: mini-panel
- Some topics could be presented on posters rather than as sessions. Jane is willing to create posters using information that others provide.
- MN Cropland Grazing Exchange: This was a collaborative project. Gene would like to have Kent present about that.

- Lots of turnover in NRCS programs. Get some agency people into the session to tell us what the barriers are; get more external people in to tell us what's lacking. USDA and US-FWS folks; have a back-and-forth exchange about obstacles.
- Split the day? Obstacles vs. Solutions
- Include a panel discussion/forum at the end
  - Gretta Landis recently facilitated a good conversation re: grazing on public lands; could ask her to attend.

#### Discussion:

- Do we want a cohesive session, or a series of snapshots of projects?
  - Value of snapshots: there are lots of ways to integrate livestock into cropping systems, but people outside of our group aren't aware of them – so maybe it's useful to provide that series of snapshots along with a what worked/what didn't work discussion.
- The list of excuses for not integrating livestock is really long. Can we answer some of the excuses?
  - As you get away from corn & beans, bankers get nervous. Farmers look at the extra work with livestock and don't want to do it.
  - Need to talk about both environmental benefits AND financial benefit for farmers/landowners. We need to be able to talk about some short-term payoff, not just about benefits several years down the road – that starts to sound too theoretical.
    - Criteria for loan repayment
    - Do we have good economic data?
    - We have good data on soil health, water quality, etc. – but if we can't show \$ to the farmers, this doesn't help.
    - [Potential topic to develop into a group project: engage with agencies, bankers. Similar to some work LSP is already doing with bankers. This would be a future project: we can't really shift the attendance at the conference to ensure the right people are there for this specific conversation.]
- Theme for the MPFWG session: Overcoming barriers to getting livestock on the land.
  - Ways to Integrate + Economic Benefits
  - Need to have the financial underpinning for examples. Present the economic data up front so it can feed into the discussion.
  - Have some provocative presentations with snappy titles; try to attract agency folks.
  - Reinforce the economic data with posters.
- Format of session: What examples? We could fill up a whole day, and need to make some choices. We want to show several options
  - Present case studies that feature production + human factors + economics.
    - Real-life examples: What did we do? What did we see? What tools did we use?
  - Message: We're here to help you put livestock back on the landscape.
  - Case studies:
    - Robert Bauer – land linking
    - Kent Solberg – integration of cover crops & livestock
    - Joe Sellers – Steenhoeks

- Q & A session at the end of the session
  - “plant” a few questions
- Put out all of the reasons why not – all the excuses for not integrating livestock – and answer the why-nots with the case study examples.
- Excuse list from Kent Solberg:
  - No fencing
  - No watering system
  - Soil compaction
  - No one has livestock around here
  - No one will move cows/water this far
  - Predators
  - Pastures too small
  - I don't have time/ability
  - Who will take care of hurt/sick animals
  - No loading facility
  - I don't want to handle cows anymore
  - Don't want bulls around
  - Don't want to be bothered by livestock
  - Not competitive with cropland rents
  - Nothing in it for me as a landowner
- Session schedule
  - 5-10 minute intro by Kent Solberg
  - 30 min. case study by Kent Solberg
  - 20 min. case study by Robert Bauer
  - 20 min. case study (Joe Sellers?)
  - 40 min. Q & A/discussion with planted questions

Next step: Have another call to decide on the planted questions and finalize details.