

Midwest Perennial Forage Working Group
conference call, 9/30/14

Present:

Laura Paine
Caroline Van Schaik
Margaret Chamas
Meghan Filbert
Kent Solberg
Terry VanDerPol
James Paulson
Jane Jewett

Laura Paine led the discussion on the SARE R & E proposal.

Timeframe: Laura will send out the revised proposal next week for comments; revisions will be done from 10/17 through 10/20; and a final version will be produced by 10/23, which is the due date for submission.

List of participants: include Dean Thomas, Kent Solberg, Troy Salzer, Caroline Van Schaik

Abstract:

- Make a point of mentioning CRP land emerging from contract. This is part of an important and timely background scenario:
 - Expiring CRP acres
 - Falling grain prices
 - Livestock feed costs
- Don't specify "beef" as the livestock
- Change "wildlife habitat" to "grassland bird habitat"

Discussion of whether to focus only on marginal lands or include mention of row crop lands. Laura's approach was to target the most at-risk lands that are most in need of protection. These were put into CRP because of HEL or other critical issues. There is a perceived and real economic risk of putting grazing on the highest-quality agricultural land.

- Can we cite Rod Ofte's numbers re: profitability of grazing? Some graziers are making money on what could be good corn & bean land.
- Non-farming landowners often have a stewardship "bent" and want to see alternatives to row crops.

Discussion of how to present this to reviewers in very brief wording.

- Not targeting specific parcels of land. We don't want to exclude corn & bean growers if they are interested, but they are not the focus.
- We want to address the problem of land in row crops that should not be.
- What wording would be best: "HEL," "sensitive land," "marginal land," "land that should never have been plowed," -- ?
- Have to make the case that we're addressing a serious sustainable ag problem in the region.
- Refer to livestock producers and landowners in the same breath: dual focus.

Outcomes:

The MN group talked about throttling back the mentoring angle. Some liked a team-building approach of experienced graziers with expert back-up to assist graziers. LSP is forming networks of graziers in some areas and likes the idea of resource workshops.

PFI's role will be a session at their 2016 annual conference and a series of in-state workshops. The workshops will be used to contact people and do outreach. The emphasis would not be on mentoring.

How to handle mentoring in the proposal?

- Mentoring will be a component, but may not need to mention it.
- Don't want to promise something that isn't delivered.
- The budget currently has a line-item for mentoring honorarium. Suggest turning it into "farmer honorarium;" then it could be used for farmers who serve as mentors or for farmers who host a field day.
- Frame mentoring as something that could be carried forward beyond the end of the grant term.

It would be nice to include an outcome statement about soil/water/wildlife benefit, but word limits may prevent that.

Method/Approach:

- Remove specific names of groups and refer to the above list of partners.
- Keep language re: non-profits partnering with Extension and land-grant universities.
- Reference on-going innovative efforts; there's a larger body of work that this builds upon.

Relevance:

"Marginal land –" use same wording as in earlier sections.

Impact:

Suggestions to include sheep, goats, cow/calf, and dairy in the list of livestock enterprises.

Laura: Rationale for the list of enterprises is to signal that we know what we're talking about, and that some classes of livestock are more suitable for contract grazing than others. Some people are grazing

dairy cows on neighboring land, but in general, the idea of dairy contract grazing raises a red flag for people. We need to avoid saying this.

Terry: People are doing really interesting things locally – we want to make those known.

Suitability of Method:

Change wording re: mentoring.

Budget and Categories: More info needed from SARE; Laura will contact Beth Nelson.