

Midwest Perennial Forage Working Group

In-person meeting

Oneota Food Co-op, Decorah, IA

April 12, 2017

Present:

Meghan Filbert

Vance Haugen

Doug Gucker

Caroline Van Schaik

Gene Schriefer

Jane Jewett

Laura Paine

Kent Solberg

Jim Paulson

Dick Cates via conference call

Richard Warner via conference call

Round-Robin Updates

Meghan Filbert

- Brought some PFI handouts with her, including a research report and the two new fact sheets on corn and soybean herbicides allowed or restricted for subsequent grazing.
- On-farm research projects are ongoing: feedlot and corn and bean farmers are grazing cover crops and putting value to that. PFI is collecting data and doing field days.
- Herbicide fact sheets: It was difficult to present the information about grazing restrictions. We settled on verbatim quotes from the labels. There has been limited feedback on these fact sheets; a little bit from progressive farmers.
 - Noted that a dairy near Stewartville/Byron in MN had to dump milk for a month out of “an abundance of caution” after a positive residue test.
 - Farmer interviews in Iowa have included promotion of the fact sheets.
 - Next step – communication with chemical companies about improving their labeling re: grazing?
 - How to promote the fact sheets – ideas:
 - Wisconsin Crop Protection conference; approval needs to go through the WI perennial weed specialist.
 - Heidi Johnson, cover crop expert in WI
 - Michael Fields Agricultural Institute – Laura will check and get these on the site.
 - Caroline has been pushing these at her workshops and events.
 - Meghan forwarded them to Anna Morrow at MCCC. (the fact sheets are on the MCCC website as of 5/23/17.)

- Protocol for workshops: If you're having farmers speak about their experiences in grazing cover crops, don't put them on the spot re: exact 'cides they have used.
- Grazing cover crops: 4 field days planned for this spring. A field day on 4/11/17 had 46 people attend.
- PFI has 28 field days scheduled from June through October.
- PFI got an Organic Valley grant to test feeding of apple cider vinegar to dairy cows. Brad Heins at the University of Minnesota is a cooperator:
 - Feeding the whole herd 3 months on, 3 months off (except for some farmer collaborators not willing to do 3 months off)
 - Some farms are doing 1 year on, 1 year off
 - Not all dairies in the project are organic dairies
 - Data collection:
 - Manure testing
 - Digestibility score
 - Milk volume
 - Milk components
 - Body condition scoring; one person will take all scores

Vance Haugen

- The pasture walk schedule was sent out on April 11. All pasture walks this year are in Wisconsin except for one on the Haugen farm.
- Passed a 5-year review for Extension. In the past 5 years, Vance has organized 61 pasture walks that reached 1,606 people.
- UW-Extension cuts are ongoing. A new structure of regions of 3 to 5 counties with a regional administrator may be implemented in January 2018.
- Working with a pastured pork marketing co-op modeled after the Wisconsin Grass-Fed Beef co-op.
- Example of a large dairy in Houston County, MN that is looking at 1000 acres of land in Crawford County, WI to run beef cow-calf pairs on all grass. Interesting to see diversification from dairy into beef production. The dairy is not grass-based.
 - Good potential for grazing dairy heifers and dry cows; not so much in dairies grazing cows that are in production. It should be a no-brainer to have heifer and dry cow grazing, but that hasn't happened very much.
- Upcoming: 2-week US-AID Farmer-to-Farmer gig in Nicaragua, focusing on biogas. This will be Vance's 5th trip to Nicaragua.

Doug Gucker

- University of Illinois Extension is reorganizing again; this is Extension 3.0. It's happening in response to zero state funding. All Extension staff are now supported by counties.
- Dean Kidwell is supportive of Extension and people have a place if they're on board with the new organization.

- The focus is now on benefit for the citizens of Illinois.
 - There was about 10 years of corporate-directed research that was lucrative for awhile but ultimately left Extension with nothing to give to farmers. There is now a shift in policy within Extension.
- We're seeing more livestock on the land. Typical configuration: large-ish herds, about 80 acres of permanent pasture, grazing of residues, building or feedlot and feeding of harvested forages.
- Investing in buildings and animals is often a better option for a next generation coming back to the farm than cash-renting more acres.
- Corn residue grazing is working well for some farmers. Leaving a 2% residue is a lot of corn kernels per acre out of a 250-bu yield. Doug is promoting PFI's herbicide fact sheets.

Caroline Van Schaik

- Shout-out to Meghan for great events in Iowa. One was a field day featuring a rented, row-cropped, cover-cropped field; there was cash rent paid for the grain and rental of the cover crops for livestock grazing. Meghan facilitated the arrangement.
- Caroline is a partner along with Meghan and Kent in some Pasture Project-funded events.
- Land Stewardship Project held successful indoor field days on soil health in January, February, and March.
 - February field day featured Kristine Nichols, soil scientist with Rodale Institute.
 - Nichols's presentation started out as organic vs. non-organic, which was not at all the message LSP wanted to promote, so Caroline was upset – but then she shifted to discussion of building soil health without promoting organic agriculture, including discussion of grazing.
 - Nichols's father also spoke and really sold the method of building soil health.
 - Each event had farmer panels with a diversity of types of farmers doing soil-building
- LSP has held soil health meetings at different times of day and different days of the week, and have seen that people come out if the topic is worthwhile to them. They have had ~100 people at these meetings; 150 at the Nichols talk. A diverse group of farmers has attended, not all LSP members.
- The LSP soil health team is leading a cohort of farmers who come to the LSP offices to work on soil building ideas and plans. There are diverse ages and good camaraderie. We're working on an electronic platform for fostering connections.
- Caroline wants to do Craig Chase-type financial analyses of soil-building scenarios.
 - Take leading financial indicators and focus on those.
 - Don't get really complicated with pro-rating mortgage or health care
 - Similar to Holistic Management's gross profit analysis
 - This effort is happening in the next 2 months; then Caroline is done at LSP.

Gene Schriefer

- Working on organizing Pasture Walk schedule for summer. The majority will be on dairy and beef grazing; including some on contract grazing.
- Working with some dairy goat producers who are trying doing some goat grazing and seeing feed costs go down.

- Grazing pigs is an area of interest.
 - A workshop in Virocqua, WI had 41 attendees.
 - The “Underground Food Collective” cooperative of chefs in Madison, WI buy \$3 million of outdoor-raised pigs from 40 farms in SW WI. The farmers could sell more if they had consistent supply.
 - “Forage-Fed pigs” are being marketed to the Green Bay Packers by Steve Diveley of Golden Bear Farm.
 - Estimate of 70 to 80 pastured pork producers in SW WI. There’s a pastured pork cooperative for people who want to raise pigs but don’t want to direct market; has about 40 members.
 - There is a lot of education we could do on pastured pork production.
- Forage and livestock as a farm expansion or generational transfer strategy
 - Adding or expanding livestock seen as more feasible than running more acres of cropland
 - More people are looking at total conversion to grass and adding cattle in order to bring a next generation back to the farm.
 - Example of Jones farm transitioning 300 acres of corn into fenced pasture. A son came back from college and wanted to go into grazing.
 - Another example: whole-farm conversion to pasture (~200 acres), bringing 400 cows up from Illinois for summer grazing, cows return to IL to graze crop residues in winter.
- Watershed work continues on Lowery Creek: nutrient management, rotational grazing, cover crops, silvopasture
 - Relationship-building visits between Gulf of Mexico shrimpers and fishermen, and the farmers of Southwest Wisconsin. What the farmers do matters to Gulf fishermen.
 - Video: <https://vimeo.com/190596157>
 - Selected farmers had a meeting about cover crops organized by Margaret Krome of Michael Fields Institute.
 - Using DATCP funds for small-scale watershed work
 - Trying to document change in the stream that runs past farms in the watershed due to changes in farm management
 - Looking for small victories, demonstration project to get people looking and thinking.
- Patch-burn grazing work
 - Data from a south central Iowa study begun in 2012; The Nature Conservancy had an 18,000 acre block, removed cattle, then had a hard time controlling invasives so is bringing back cattle and using patch-burn techniques for grazing management.

Laura Paine

- Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship is still growing. Now in 9 states and recently approved 5 new master graziers. Some attrition of both mentors and students happens. The apprenticeship is set up to be an alternative to formal classroom study, but it does require 6 online classes and that is too much for some people.

- DGA applied for a Conservation Innovation Grant to expand into IN, OH, and MI so they could work in all Great Lakes states. Of 50,000 dairy farms in the US, 2/3 are in the Great Lakes region.
- DGA is working with University staff and providing grant \$ for salaries.
- Jim Paulson was hired to co-coordinate with Bonnie Haugen
- Kent Solberg is the newest master.
- PDP grants applied for:
 - DGA applied for one focusing on training mentors as ag professionals. It was originally pitched as retiring farmers training successors, but we're finding mid-career farmers who want to train successive apprentices and invest in them.
 - GrassWorks applied for one to continue training RC & D and NRCS staff on pasture soil health.
- University of Wisconsin projects:
 - WICS trial: Wisconsin Integrated Cropping Systems long-term research looks at 6 systems; 3 of those include livestock and grazing. Laura and Dick Cates met with trial managers to revamp the grazing systems.
 - Marshfield experiment station is ramping up some grazing research, putting in 40 acres of pasture. There is not a lot of support from the dairy science program at this point.
 - 1950s-era research at Marshfield showed that greenchop was better than grazing for livestock productivity. There was an issue with framing of the research question.

Kent Solberg

- FinBin farm financial data collected through the Farm Business Management program is being sorted in various ways to return interesting statistics:
 - \$7/acre profit for corn production with commercial fertilizer vs. \$97/acre profit with cover crops, grazing of cover crops, and manure application to fields
- The Minnesota Cropland Grazing Exchange website has been launched. It was a project of the MDA's Kelly Anderson, Kent Solberg, and Jeff Duchesne of the NRCS. It's a matching platform for people with forages available for grazing, and livestock producers looking for grazing land to rent.
 - It's usually a revelation for crop producers that people will truck livestock up to 250 miles and do fencing in order to have access to grazing land.
 - MDA is managing the database. It will depopulate once per year.
 - Pins on the online map point to centers of townships, so there is a little privacy built in.
 - Cost was \$40,000 for MDA's IT to create the map.
 - This is offered as a free service from MDA; it replaces the conservation grazing website.
 - The map is as simple as possible so it can be used by people who aren't tech-savvy.
- Working on a CIG grant with Meghan and Caroline, that is documenting the lesser-known benefits of soil health management
 - Putting some dollars on less-tangible benefits. What's the value of timely work in agriculture? What's the value of not burying equipment and not having to fix ruts in the field? What's the value of not having gully erosion?

- One producer using cover crops called his co-op for the fertilizer spreader. The co-op couldn't believe he was getting into his field – everyone around was too wet.
 - We need to get these farmers who are saving money or gaining money due to timely operations on a discussion panel.
- Overcoming resistance: Lots of farmers won't go to an event sponsored by SFA or LSP because of preconceived ideas about philosophies, etc.
 - Kent includes information about herbicides and grazing in all of his PPTs, which have been seen by about 700 people in MN.
 - He also presents Vance's parlor schematic in all presentations.
- Project last summer involved custom-grazing of cover crops with a blended herd from two farms who had never done custom grazing before, and on land never grazed before, belonging to one of the largest farms in Minnesota. It took 3 years of discussion before the project happened.
 - 190 cow/calf pairs went into 400 acres of cover crops.
 - Water was hauled in a 4,000-gallon tanker to 6 gravity-fed water tanks
 - The issue of herbicides and grazing of cover crops was known up-front and is being managed.
 - Learning curve re: cropping system and cover cropping. The ROI in a single year is an issue for the farm's accounting system; many of the benefits turn up in the second year or later.
 - The livestock producers wound up having to pay for cover crop seed. That was a pain point – there wasn't a written agreement about the seed.
 - Livestock producers are taking all the risk and providing soil health improvement benefits. The farm needs to value that; Kent keeps reminding them of that when they encounter inconveniences related to the presence of livestock and fencing.
- Projects on goat grazing for removal of invasives
 - There's a buckthorn and garlic mustard removal project in SE MN under the sponsorship of Ecological Services Livestock Network.
 - We want to build a framework/business model around this: All you need to launch a weed control business are goats, fencing, a trailer, and some contract negotiating skills.
 - Built a framework with the City of Minneapolis; worked through their ordinances to allow grazing of goats within the City.
 - Working with immigrant/minority communities to do training and launch businesses within the communities that are themselves a market for goat meat.
 - Train the farmers in interview skills so they can be good ambassadors when approached by media
 - Use the DGA model to train more people
 - There may be Soybean dollars available for this work, due to the benefit to soybean producers of buckthorn removal.
 - We're not going for eradication by the goats, but 90% defoliation followed by mechanical removal. Do that treatment annually for three years, then monitoring after that.
- Partnering on SARE R & E grant project for comparison of pasture measuring tools. Partners are Rod Greder in U of MN Extension, Scotty Wells in U of MN Department of Agronomy & Plant

Genetics, Tom Gervais of NRCS, and Lynn Mizner, DNR staff and sheep farmer near Palisade, MN.

- Evaluating 18 tools in the first year, calibration in the second year, training in third year.
- Evaluating the tools' value for measuring both forage quantity and quality.
- This got started because pasture sticks were out of print in MN and there was a discussion about calibrating them, which spun into a larger project.

Jim Paulson

- Transitioned out of Extension and is now working with Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship.
- Minnesota Dairy Initiative (MDI) is talking about the need to prepare for the "silver tsunami" – aging farmers needing to transition their operations.
 - Example: 65 year old dairy farmer looking to transition; the farm is suitable for grazing; we need to show that grazing is a viable path to farm start-up if you aren't inheriting land.
- Need for more, and more effective, and longer-term, support to ensure success of dairy beginners.
 - DGA follows people for the first 5 years, through apprenticeship to the point of farm ownership.
 - MDI puts a team of advisers on people after their apprenticeship is completed.
 - FSA classifies farmers as "beginning farmers" for 10 years.
 - DGA has a Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program grant to put resources into tracking graduates of their program.
 - Graduates tend to overestimate their forage production and milk production on their own farms, when they are going from an established host farm to their own, less-established situation.
 - Land transition pathways was an initial goal of DGA.

Discussion of current situation re: milk buyers dropping farmers in Midwest:

- Grassland in Wisconsin, a milk buyer and the largest butter plant in the U.S., sent letters out on April 1 to 70 to 80 dairy farmers, informing them they would be off the truck as of May 1.
- Hard to get the true story about reasons. A butter factory/milk plant in Canada was taking high-protein concentrated milk product from the U.S., and recently announced they weren't going to take it anymore. That changed the economics for U.S. milk plants.
- The announcement affected 10 farms in Minnesota.
- Grassland is not a co-op. They were paying a \$1/cwt premium, but now their farmers are taking a \$1/cwt discount to get on a truck.
- Westby currently has a \$5/cwt discount.
- Organic Valley is penalizing farms that ship more than their allotted amount of milk. Premiums are steady for allotted amounts, but OV is paying less than conventional price for milk over the allotment.

Discussion re: grazing research and training of agency field staff:

You need the right incentives. We're not currently seeing the right monetary incentives for conservationists or grazing educators. The typical small \$2000 to \$3000 grants for projects can help nudge someone in a programming direction, but it doesn't cover a salary.

Discussion of patch-burn grazing and grazing on public lands:

Kent Solberg is doing some work with the MN DNR. Unfortunately the sole focus is on patch-burn grazing; they aren't interested in high stock density grazing. In the northwest part of MN, there aren't enough livestock producers to support public land management with grazing animals.

- The MN-DNR Commissioner is supportive of grazing and has background with TNC and Trout Unlimited, but doesn't dictate to his field staff.
- DNR wildlife people are generally very leery of cattle in streams and streambanks. Ability to do grazing on public lands comes down to field staff comfort level with grazing; many come from a place of animosity toward agriculture.
- Trying to work on attitude changes: it's not Ag vs. Conservation.
- Grazing infrastructure is a limiting factor on public lands.
 - The MN Attorney General has grave concerns about liability from livestock getting out on highways. MN also has an antiquated fence law.
 - MN Attorney General also has concerns about statutory restrictions on monetary gain from public land use.
 - Kent is working on explaining the managed grazing concept: fences are maintained and cows aren't hungry.
- Water infrastructure is also limiting on public lands.
- We've had this discussion for 15 years about fence and water needs: there are solutions, but the barriers are enough of an excuse if people don't want to go down that road. The next generation of wildlife managers are more open to grazing as a management tool, but there are conflicting paradigms within agency offices.
- Fisheries managers and Trout Unlimited have adopted the watershed concept and tend to be grazing advocates.
- You need the right message at the right time. Grazing is not all-or-nothing.

Jane Jewett: presented website and Grazing Educators Slide Library.

Comments:

- Put presenter biographies up at the top of each slide library segment.
- Track downloads
- Use a form to capture contact information of those using the material
- Include contact information for presenters & encourage people to contact presenters for more information and context
- Add slides about GLBW and MPFWG
- Add GLBW to the "Fair Use" statement

- Remove Pasture Project logo from the Slide Library pages

Kernza Research Update

- Kernza is currently in the establishment phase
- Dealing with crop residue is a challenge for establishment. Seeding rate is 8-9 lbs./acre PLS.
- One to two field days are planned this summer
- On-farm trial in Lancaster includes a graze-grain harvest-graze regrowth pattern and a grain-only pattern.
- 3 to 4 acre plots established at Arlington research station.
- Once established, Kernza is very competitive.
 - Craig Sheaffer at U of MN has been doing clipping studies to determine forage yield
 - Over time, seed yields will go down. Crowns get established and then spread vegetatively. Forage production remains good.
 - Heavy grazing might help restore a stand.
 - Burn + graze might work as well, but would have to not graze in the fall followed by spring burn.
 - Even if Kernza becomes a 3 or 4-year crop, that's still better than annual row-cropping.
- Field day June 29 at Frantzen farm: Kernza for ragweed suppression
- Plovgh is the organization hired by The Land Institute to handle farmer requests and distribution of Kernza seed.
- Presentation by Richard Warner re: Kernza marketing efforts

GLBW 2017 Conference (Dick Cates joined from remote)

- Twelve potential keynote speakers have been identified
- Organizers are looking for a unified theme
- Savannah Institute wants to piggyback on the conference with a meeting before
- Would like to highlight the Wisconsin long-term cropping trial, Great Lakes Bioenergy Research, and Dairy Forage Research Center; challenge is focusing and winnowing
- 40 potential sponsors
- Maximum attendee number for the venue is 200.
- NRCS in Wisconsin is a conference co-sponsor. There will be outreach to NRCS and Soil & Water Conservation Districts to encourage staff to attend.
- Dates are November 28-29 in Madison, WI
- Co-chairs are Diane Mayerfeld and Pam Porter
- Potential title: "Continuous Living Cover: Bridging the Gap with Livestock"
- Sessions for regional collaboration on CLC strategies; tour of watersheds; working group meetings.
- Draft agenda is available. Dick will send it.

The MPFWG session: How do we link livestock and grazing to the other Working Groups?

- More big picture or more technical details?

- Innovation in agency programs and policies: what needs to happen to make programs more mature and useful?
 - What can MPFWG do that is useful?
- Should be as concrete as possible: here's how we propose to really do livestock integration.
- Focus MN/WI/IA
- Get real farmers there to talk to conservationists: real experiences backed up by science, show that it can be done.
- Need to have speakers who aren't as far along as Gabe Brown, but far enough along to say they're never going back. Gabe Brown is setting the bar, but it's too high – we need to showcase people at different levels of adoption of grazing.
- Format: guest speaker + local panel
- MPFWG should organize a plenary session. The next conference planning session is May 2.
 - Plenary topic: 12-month calendar of grazing with different CLC practices: this is how it could work on the ground. Have MPFWG members tag-team the presentation.
 - Make sure it's clear that plenary speakers are paid for by the conference

RMA Grant for Dairy Grazing Case Studies

- Vance sees a plateau in adoption of grazing in dairy production
- We need to document and promote grazing as a tool within dairy systems: for dry cows, heifers, or in a hybrid system of grazing + feeding. Promote partial adoption, not full adoption.
- Include soil health component
- Include formal presentation to Farm Business Management, bankers, etc.
- Deadline is July 5.