

# Midwest Perennial Forage Working Group

In-Person Meeting

Hotel Winneshiek, Decorah, IA

May 3, 2016

Present:

Terry VanDerPol – Land Stewardship Project (co-chair)

Laura Paine – Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship (co-chair)

Jane Jewett – Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (staff)

Meghan Filbert – Practical Farmers of Iowa

Vance Haugen – University of Wisconsin Extension

Richard Cates – Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems, UW-Madison

Jim Paulson – University of Minnesota Extension

Doug Gucker – University of Illinois Extension

Kent Solberg – Sustainable Farming Association of MN

Gene Schriefer – University of Wisconsin Extension

## Round-Robin Updates

Meghan Filbert:

Practical Farmers of Iowa has a schedule of 25 field days set for 2016; 14 of those are focused on cover crops and management-intensive grazing. PFI holds 5 grants related to Continuous Living Cover and integration of livestock; and there are 20 on-farm research projects associated with those grants. The next PFI annual conference will be January 19-21, 2017.

Vance Haugen:

UWEX-Crawford County has 12 pasture walks scheduled for 2016 with a focus on soil health. These include organic and conventional beef and dairy farms, and also goat dairy. He presented at the 2016 PFI conference. Noted that UWEX is being cut and reorganized. Vance has 31 years with the organization.

Dick Cates:

The CIAS Beginning Farmer programs are very strong. The beginning dairy farmer course has added distance education in Maine and is expanding to Minnesota and Missouri, in association with the Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship (DGA). Nadia Alber with CIAS is on the DGA board. On a personal note, Dick's son moved back to the farm. They purchased an additional 100 acres and son has grazing contracts. As a past Leopold Award winner, Dick has been invited to the Sand County Foundation conference to provide ideas re: their future efforts. The Cates farm will host the International Society for Conservation Biology in July. Margaret Krome is coordinating a DATCP farmer-led watershed grant for Lowery Creek, which passes through the Cates farm and ends at Taliesin. There are currently five farmer-cooperators on board including Gary Zimmer; there will be a field day in September.

Jim Paulson:

Lives in the Root River Watershed where he sees the changes in cropping systems and the damage

done; it's very upsetting. More perennial ground cover is badly needed. The need for work on grazing and perennial cover is great, but Extension is pushing him to have more of an urban focus.

Doug Gucker:

Local Food System/Small Farm educator in the University of Illinois Extension system, central IL. Previously worked for a non-profit in water quality. University of Illinois has a new president from New York State where there is a strong Extension Small Farms program; he has brought a new focus on Extension and sees the value of outreach work. Doug is preparing for the Illinois Forage Expo, which will be in southern IL this year and will have a grazing track. They will tour an area farm that uses intensive grazing. Grazing and forage are having a rebirth in IL. Weed resistance is making GMO corn & beans look less attractive. Organic grain prices aren't high enough to tempt many farmers to transition. Farmers are looking at forages as an alternative to low-priced grain.

Kent Solberg:

Sustainable Farming Association works intensively on integrating livestock; currently working with Pasture Project on a Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG). SFA is based in Minnesota and has a "virtual office" with staff people located around the state. They hold the annual Midwest Soil Health Summit; Allen Williams is a great resource for that. SFA just finished a Farm Skills 101 course, which is an intensive 6-day, 50 to 60-hour program in ground-level beginning farmer training. We've lost basic skills: people don't recognize common hand tools, don't know how to change spark plugs or change a tire – we teach minor equipment maintenance tasks, fence-building, basic wood shop, driving a tractor + implement, etc. We have a 2-day workshop scheduled for the end of May with Allen Williams and other field days scheduled for the summer. Currently getting lots of questions from farmers as they head into the fields, especially re: cover crops.

Gene Schriefer:

Works primarily in Iowa County, WI; covers a little bit of Grant, Lafayette & Green Counties. Conducts about 10 pasture walks per year. The area is a commuter area for Madison and also a retirement destination for Chicago. About 60% of the land is owned by non-farmers, and there are many hobby or "lifestyle" farmers. Have gone from about 300 down to 200 dairy farms in the past 7 to 8 years. The 40 to 50 cow dairies are going away. Topography in the county dictates that the land should be in grass, but only about 10% of livestock producers use good grazing management. Much land transitioning out of CRP has gone into row crops, but economic analyses using crop price forecasts shows that putting land back into pasture would be the only profitable option. Denise Schwab is getting lots of calls about re-establishing pasture. Gene's view of obstacles to more and better grazing: 1) Farmers hang out at the feed mill and talk, and it's all about maximum yield; little understanding of difference between "maximum" and "optimum." 2) Historical devotion to N application; skepticism of UW research and concern for the environment. Gene does nutrient management plan work for Iowa County. He's helping plan the Wisconsin Cover Crop Conference for mid-August. Involved with Great Lakes Bioenergy Research Center, which is looking to establish biomass crops on marginal land. Also involved with the DATCP/Lowery Creek project, and with the Kernza grazing research project headed up by Valentin Picasso of UW-Madison.

Laura Paine:

Working with Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship to set up apprenticeships on approved private dairy farms.

This is a 2-year paid apprenticeship and includes 300 hours of classroom instruction. Cornell University and PASA are both interested in picking up the program, so it is expanding rapidly. Currently there are 20 to 25 active apprenticeships. There are 50 to 60 applications waiting for placement and about 60 farms approved as mentors. There have been 10 graduates from the program. GrassWorks secured a SARE-PDP grant that involves the Wisconsin Grazing Networks; they will conduct trainings for pasture management, focused on soil health. Laura is on the board of Michael Fields Agricultural Institute, which is doing a lot of work in SW Wisconsin on cover crops. They currently have a partnership with The Nature Conservancy to create a protective buffer around a lake and wetland; MFAI purchased the acreage for research. Laura also does grazing planning on the side; currently working with a landowner who purchased 1,000 acres across the river from the Aldo Leopold Center and who wants to convert the land to pasture and wildlife habitat.

Terry VanDerPol:

Working on templates for conservation in lease agreements. Working with recreational landowners in a project to organize collaborative grazing on 5,000 acres for conservation purposes; this takes lots of organization. Has found that individual landowners are easier to work with than TNC or the DNR; more likely to be flexible and understand graziers' needs. LSP has a diverse cropping systems decision tool in development, which goes public in about a month. LSP and SWCDs are seeking training on the SAMS (Stochastic Analysis Modeling and Simulation) method for understanding hydrology, to try to understand the impact of cropping system on water system. It is a potential engagement tool for work with farmers. More economic analysis is underway for the Chippewa 10% project. CURE (Clean Up our River Environment) is holding convenings in communities for discussion of a water ethic. LSP has found that discussion of water leads to discussion of a land ethic; seems to open a new space for that values discussion.

## MPFWG Structure & Organization

- Consider coming up with a pronounceable acronym
- Need more structure now that the group has a budget for which we are responsible
- Need tangible outputs
- Suggestion for core group as the decision-making body; plus communication with a larger network.
  - Suggested core group = those present at this meeting, plus Joe Sellers, Caroline Van Schaik, Warren King
  - Discussion of whether membership is by individuals, or by organizations. Terry noted that for LSP, they have made a decision to have one person attend the in-person meetings; but that is a resource-allocation decision within LSP and doesn't mean that an organization is restricted to one member on MPFWG.
- Discussion of how members view their/their organizations' future with MPFWG:
  - Jim Paulson: Need to report on impacts, and how his work relates to major initiatives at the U of MN. Needs to be able to point to outputs from the group, and have his name associated with those outputs.
  - Doug Gucker: Illinois has had no grazing research program since 1990s and is losing most on-campus Extension specialists. There is some research focused on feeding of co-

products to livestock. There are cuts to other entities that deal with grazing. It falls to Doug and one other educator to take care of grazing education needs. He's looking for educational resources.

- Meghan Filbert: It's hard to participate in the GLBW Conference in the fall because it's the same time of year as the PFI cooperators' meeting – PFI is busy analyzing on-farm research results and preparing to report that back to cooperators. Cannot take time away to attend the GLBW conference. Very willing to participate at other times of the year.
  - Laura Paine: Has struggled with the co-chair position since her new job is more tangential to the goals of MPFWG, instead of being squarely centered on the same goals. It would be good to have someone who could commit more time as co-chair; she's willing step down.
  - Kent Solberg: In it for as long as he can, as much as he can. Note: Wayne Monsen has been involved but is now very part-time; semi-retired.
  - Vance Haugen and Gene Schriefer: Lots of uncertainty due to changes in UW-Extension. Unclear what their positions will be or if they will have positions in the near future.
  - Dick Cates: CIAS is hosting the 2017 GLBW Conference so that means involvement with GLBW. He's very willing to add MPFWG goals and documents on to field days on his farm. Would be interested in the co-chair position for MPFWG if he wasn't already booked up with local school board, etc.
  - Terry VanDerPol: LSP sees its goals as very aligned with those of GLBW, and will continue to participate with MPFWG.
- Schedule of calls & meetings
    - Quarterly meetings; annual in-person meeting counts as one of these.
      - Quarterly conference calls on morning of first Weds.:
        - July 6, 2016
        - October 5, 2016
        - January 4, 2017
      - Next annual in-person meeting on Tuesday, April 4, 2017
  - Co-chairs – could keep them the same until January, then call for new co-chairs. Revisit this.

## MPFWG's Value and Reason for Existence

Question: What ties all of the Continuous Living Cover/Cropping System/Soil Health concepts together?

Answer: Livestock!

- MPFWG needs to become integral to GLBW and really stable.
- MPFWG needs to tell the non-industrial-ag side of the story
  - Put value on benefits or amenities of grassland that are hard to value and count
  - Announce that "T" is not, in fact, "tolerable"
  - Be forward in discussion of climate change adaptation & resilience

- Help underwrite work in the region via mini-grants
  - Encourage multi-disciplinary effort
  - Add value to existing efforts by organizations

## Mini-Grant Program

Models considered: MN-SARE, WI-SARE, Iowa Beef Center

- Key objective: Integration of livestock
  - Grazing focus
  - Perennial forage focus
  - Multi-sector involvement (research, Extension, other educators, crop consultants, ag service co-ops, agribusiness)
  - Encourage collaboration with other GLBW Working Groups and the Watershed Initiative
  - Look for potential impact on soil health, water quality, system resilience to climate change
  
- Eligibility & Requirements
  - Okay to pay salary with mini-grant funds
    - This is necessary for involvement of many small and even mid-size non-profits; you have to be able to pay staff to do the work.
  - Must have involvement of a MPFWG member group; either led by or a significant partner
  - Activity must be in at least one GLBW-involved state in the Upper Mississippi River Basin: IA, IL, MN, MO, WI
  - No capital investment allowed (buildings, equipment, etc.) without a darned good educational reason
    - Prefer not to ban it outright; there may be cases where this is needed for effective demonstration of a practice.
  - Meals or snacks allowed, but applicant must make the case as to why they're important to the project.
  - Successful applicant must provide a final report on outputs & outcomes of the mini-grant.
  - Any digital or print materials developed can be posted on MPFWG or GLBW website and shall include GLBW logo.
  
- Criteria
  - Must integrate livestock. No livestock = no mini-grant.
  - Must address soil health, water quality, system resilience to climate variations
  - Points for multi-state collaboration
  - Points for multi-sector collaboration
  - Points for multi-organization collaboration
  - Points for multiple audiences

- Points for tangible deliverables. Encourage tangible deliverables to be part of any projects focused on workshops or field days. Examples:
  - Develop 1-page fact sheet based on workshop presentations, to be distributed to crop advisors
  - Publish results of soil tests associated with a field day demonstration project
  - Provide workshop or field day PPTs to MPFWG, to be housed on the MPFWG website
  
- Award Amount
  - Raise the “ask” to \$25,000 per year: 5 grants (one per state) x \$5,000
  - Fallback: fewer grants rather than smaller grants. Need to have enough \$ available in the grant to make an impact.
  
- RFP & Timeline
  - Proposal format shall be as close as possible to one page, online, use the MN-SARE application form as a template.
    - Use an online platform that will export application form data to a database.
  - Estimated timeline for this year when funding availability is currently unknown:
    - July 6 – Quarterly conference call; funding should be known; decide last details of RFP
    - July 7 – Issue RFP
    - August 6 – Proposal deadline
    - September 1 – Decision & inform recipients
  
- Review & Decision Process
  - Everyone in core group scores applications.
  - Core group members recuse selves from scoring applications they are personally involved in.
  - Jane will collate responses.
  - Conference call with core group to discuss & deliberate. Scores are not the only thing; there needs to be some qualitative consideration of likely impacts, geographical balance.

## Herbicides & Cover Crops

Meghan Filbert brought up an obstacle that she is seeing to wider adoption of cover crops and grazing of cover crops: lack of information about herbicide restrictions for subsequent grazing. There are limited herbicide regimes that can allow for grazing of cover crops. Also she noted that they are seeing cases of off-label grazing happening on cover crop plantings. Kent Solberg agreed this is a major issue that he is seeing as well, and noted there have already been cases in Minnesota, one dairy and one beef, of positive herbicide residue tests in milk or meat and quarantine of farms as a result of off-label grazing. This has the potential to turn farmers away from cover crops and integration of livestock. Herbicides are labeled with grazing restrictions, but it’s often buried in the fine print that many people don’t read. Practical Farmers of Iowa has raised the issue with Syngenta and they are very receptive to working on

changes in label layout. There is also a need for an easy-reference guide for farmers and crop advisors that is regularly updated to show herbicides and grazing restrictions, and to suggest alternatives to herbicides that would restrict grazing.

Discussion:

- We have to talk about this if we are going to talk about grazing of cover crops.
- Wisconsin has a pest management fact sheet that includes a little bit about herbicide grazing restrictions but it is very limited.
- The fact sheet should include information about both herbicide options and seed choices. The type of cover crop planted under an herbicide regime can make a difference as to whether it's graze-able or not.
- MPFWG could pick this up as a "minor" project and apply some of Jane's staff time, possibly some printing funds
- Meghan and PFI are willing to take the lead. Gene Schriefer, Kent Solberg, Doug Gucker will collaborate. Iowa Learning Farms may be willing to help.
- Audience for fact sheet:
  - CCAs & agronomists
  - NRCS
  - Extension
  - MN Dairy Initiative
  - State Cattlemen's Associations
- ID of organizations/individuals/resources in each state that should be involved:

Wisconsin	Iowa	Minnesota
Extension Beef Team Bill Halfman Annual Pest Management Update – UWEX publication #A3646 WI Grass-fed Beef Co-op	Iowa Learning Farms Iowa Beef Center Cattlemen's Association	Extension Beef Team Jeff Gunsolus Scotty Wells Elizabeth Stahl Jill Sackett

## Potential for MPFWG Involvement in Conversations between GLBW and NRCS

The GLBW Steering Committee is undertaking an effort to provide input to NRCS on its EQIP practices. Some initial information was pulled together by Sadie Schroeder last summer as part of work on the Continuous Living Cover manual: [http://greenlandsbluewater.net/EQIP\\_and\\_CLC\\_2015.pdf](http://greenlandsbluewater.net/EQIP_and_CLC_2015.pdf)

Discussion:

- Practical Farmers of Iowa has a representative on the Iowa NRCS technical committee (Sarah Carlson)

- Land Stewardship Project has a representative on the Minnesota NRCS technical committee.
- In Wisconsin, Dave Johnson who is affiliated with GrassWorks is on the state technical committee.
- Comment that efforts to influence NRCS practice standards need to go through the local and state committee infrastructure that NRCS already has in place to receive input.
- Other comments:
  - Working with NRCS at the county level isn't as useful as working directly with farmers. Progress is seen in getting "opinion generator" farmers to convert to conservation farming – then the neighbors follow suit.
  - You can't layer expensive practices on top of farmers who are already losing money. Adoption of new practices has to make them money.
  - Farmers are realizing that water quality is or will be regulated and that practices to protect water quality will be mandatory.

## 2016 GLBW Conference

This will be hosted by the Center for Agroforestry at University of Missouri, Nov. 29 & 30 in Columbia, MO

Potential topics for the MPFWG Session:

Topic	Speaker(s) or featured projects
Economics of Silvopasture	Diomy Zamora Tyler (Diomy's student)
Control of invasives through grazing	Project in Faribault, MN to develop custom-grazing as a service

Environmentally-Friendly Control of Invasives through Grazing emerged as the preferred topic. How this fits in to GLBW and MPFWG goals:

- Beginning farmer entry point; limited capital investment; no owned land required
- Grazing experience can lead to establishment of larger herd and more permanent farm situation
- Increases demand for perennial forage because a herd custom-grazing invasives during the growing season needs a home base & winter forage
- Integrates livestock into landscapes
- Provides ecological services



## 2017 GLBW Conference

Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems at UW-Madison will take the lead in organizing the conference.

CIAS offers:

- Locations on the UW-Madison campus
- Good outreach and social media presence
- Starting agroforestry & perennialization efforts

MPFWG involvement:

- Would like to help frame the conference around a theme of integrating livestock.
- Triggered by the 2015 GLBW Conference where Scotty Wells stated, “Livestock is the integrator” [for CLC strategies]
- MPFWG will participate in the planning.
  - Dick Cates will be involved through CIAS
  - Gene Schriefer will represent MPFWG on the planning team.
  - WI people will be the “face” of MPFWG in the conference planning but will keep the rest of MPFWG in the loop through emails and conference calls.
- MPFWG’s session at the 2017 conference could focus on perceived barriers to integration of livestock and ways to address those.
  - Infrastructure
  - Fencing
  - Liability issues
  - Local, state, & federal government policy issues

## Priorities for MPFWG Staff

Jane has 4 hours/week to spend on MPFWG activities. If not all taken up by organizational work and mini-grant coordination, these are other priority activities:

1. Update Contract Grazing Fact Sheets
  - a. Especially need to update rates. Survey MPFWG members for updated rate info.
2. Work with Meghan Filbert on coordinating the herbicides & grazing cover crops fact sheet
3. Create slide library
4. Google analytics report on website usage