

Midwest Perennial Forage Working Group

Conference call – 11/12/18

Denise Schwab
Kent Solberg
Jim Paulson
Gene Schriefer
Meghan Filbert
Vance Haugen
Jacob Grace
Laura Paine
Elisabeth Spratt
Jane Jewett
Robert Bauer

Round-Robin Updates:

Gene Schriefer – Gene is now the lone Extension educator for 4 counties. One open position has been filled and UW-Extension is working on others. Weather is very wet, won't stop raining, water everywhere. We are three years into the dairy crisis, and he is getting many calls from dairy producers starting to think about grazing if they want to stay in dairy. In 10 years he's been doing this, this is most interest he's ever had in grazing. Financial pressure is making people take a look at what they're doing and how they're doing it. Question from Kent: What size operations are asking re: grazing? Most in the 100-120 cow range, folks with limited experience with grazing. Some have a good story to tell about how they made the decision to change and how happy they were after they did it.

Vance Haugen – Working with Professional Dairy Graziers of WI; Vance is representing GrassWorks in that group. He's looking at a professional event for them re: grazing dairy heifers. Mostly the group represents large-scale dairies, but is making some inroads into grazing in Green Bay area. Led an educational event re: grazing dry cows & heifers, at GrassWorks. Had 13 or 14 pasture walks in 2018, average 20-25 people per, finished up with last one at Haugen's farm. UW-Extension has not filled Vance's position in Crawford Co yet. He's doing some consulting in MN and IA, one 500-cow beef farm doing intensive grazing; a smaller dairy grazing farm. Dairy is dicey with price and supply. How do you get started with advising people? Call to find out what they know, what their resources are. Example: One dairy operator who is changing to grazing now, should have 4 years ago but his father wouldn't permit it, so he got started after the father died. He has little flexibility because of his financial situation. Some farmers are doing okay, have more flexibility to make changes because they're not hemorrhaging money.

Jacob Grace – Just started with CIAS at UW-Madison. Had been grad student in the UW agroecology program. He grew up with rotational grazing in Missouri. He is the Grazing & Perennial Agriculture Specialist, a new position in CIAS. Looking for projects already going to plug into; may eventually start

own project. Not much research, more outreach. Has experience with video & audio production. Applying for grants; eager to talk with everyone in this group.

Elizabeth Spratt – Has been with Pasture Project for about a year but started full-time in July. She does a lot of support for project management. She has a degree from Tufts University in Ag, Food, and Environment; has a lot of experience with GIS. She will trade off with Pete Huff in participating on this call. Pasture Project is finalizing our project w/ LSP, PFI, SFA. We are developing a grazing how-to guide, 25-30 pp., with examples and links. Other projects: story map, Pasture Project's perspective for why regenerative grazing is great. Spatial data to support observations of how grazing works or doesn't in an area. Farmer behavior change white paper/lit review; created with assistance from PFI. All products to be released soon.

Denise Schwab – Lots of staff changes in past few months; Joe Sellers retired in September. Denise is taking his role. Two new agronomists in SE IA have interest in forages. There is a new ag engineer in NE IA; Denise will be trying to recruit him to forages through a water systems approach. Statewide we are looking at issues with feed availability. North part of state, too much rain; south, not enough until harvest and then too much. Cover crops as forage and fall grazing will be the topic for 6 tours across Iowa at the end of Nov/first part of Dec. We have several projects on spring grazing of cover crops also. We are wrapping up cow systems projects; looking at cost of production for limited grazing, traditional, and extended grazing systems. Costs, conservation, soil, water quality will all be addressed in report to come out soon (January). The report will be released through Iowa State University.

Meghan Filbert – About 1.5 weeks ago PFI brought in Anibal Pordomingo, specialist in grass-finishing systems in Argentina. He taught a group of 20 for two days, which was like a whole college course crammed into two days. Farmers were very happy with event. The PFI conference will be January 17-19 in Ames. PFI is hosting day-long short course on silvopasture with partners from Savanna Institute & others. Grazing cover crops & soil health presentation to Iowa Cattlemen's Association, which has 10,000 members in IA. They are on same page with PFI re: grazing cover crops; partnership in grant for next 3 years. PFI is working on a contract grazing grant. They are also working on a database to start playing matchmaker. There is a proposal to fund a smartphone app for cover crop grazing (on a model similar to Tinder or Uber); similar to MN Cropland Grazing Exchange but in app form. The database will be populated with consultation notes from contacts with many farmers. New venture at PFI: convened groups of farmers twice to talk about meat marketing, banding together to capture pasture-raised meats and sell larger volumes. All are PFI members; will be convening again in late winter. Comment from Kent: It's exciting to hear of work with Cattlemen's in IA; we're seeing the same thing in MN with Cattlemen's Association really grabbing on to the soil health concept.

Kent Solberg – It's really exciting to hear from Elizabeth & Jacob; that both grew up on grazing operations and are now pursuing it professionally. That adds a lot of depth to the future of grazing. Kent did a couple of pasture walks with DGA, 3 with LSP, soil health academy at Redwood Falls, presentation at White Earth, Morris field day in August, field day in Wright Co. in collaboration with NRCS via a SARE grant; two Dirt Rich events with help from NRCS & SWCDs. Partnering with Diomy Zamora on an oak savanna restoration grant thru LCCMR. On December 6th he'll have a joint workshop with Brad Heins re: low-input grazing, and will be using the RMA dairy grazing data. Dave Pratt is coming to lead a series of 4 workshops in mid-December. SFA is also planning a series of café chats on soil health, 7 or 8 across

state. Annual SFA conference will be Feb. 9, and will include a grazing & stockmanship school. Soil Health Summit will be in St. Peter in March.

Jane Jewett – Final reporting on the RMA grant is due at the end of December. Let Janne know where RMA data goes – in presentations, workshop handouts, etc. Bonnie Haugen is submitting RMA articles to the SE MN Grazing Gazette. Thank you for all the work on the RMA grant – we had a really good, cohesive team and put out some very good materials that are timely. What's the next good, timely thing to work on together?

Laura Paine – It's so energizing to hear what everyone is doing around the region. We hear a lot of bad news re: dairy but everyone here is doing cool things; it's great. Headed to Kansas City for collaborative grant project for veterans, DGA got a grant from the Farmer Veteran Coalition, to bring veterans in to the apprenticeship program. DGA is establishing a formal partnership with SFA; Hannah Molitor is on board as the coordinator for partnership in Stearns County, MN; which has a density of dairy farms. Hannah is also a DGA apprentice. We talked about and handed out the RMA materials at a DGA organizing event in Stearns Co. We will have a session on it at the GrassWorks conference also. Laura is working on the dairy track for GrassWorks, focused on addressing the economic situation in the dairy industry. Looking at lots of sessions about risk management, extreme weather, tightening up systems and finances. DGA has been working on classroom element for the apprenticeship training. Six classes are required. In the past these were provided by UW and technical colleges, but DGA has launched a new effort to bring the courses in house, via Moodle. Classes will be offered online between now and next fall. We are hoping it can become forum or hub for classes on managed grazing, organic certification, soil health, etc. DGA can host classes that people can take from all over country; maybe some opportunities for MPFWG to work with DGA to offer courses on the platform. Laura had discussions in the past about working with WI-DNR on grazing public lands. That effort is still going pretty strong; DNR is working with UW researchers to continue long-term collaboration and research on handful of sites around state: monitoring changes in vegetation and wildlife profile, building relationships between managers & farmers, developing contract grazing best practices. More wildlife managers are coming on board.

Comment from Jacob – this was my research project as a grad student.

Jim Paulson: Last month Jim went to a regenerative soil workshop in Atlanta as representative of GLBW. Topics included regenerating soil carbon, perennial ground cover, a carbon-neutral dairy model being worked on, lots of moving parts & lots of interesting people in the group. The group included supply chain people from Nestle, Ben & Jerry's, etc. Some producers were present also. Major companies have a desire to improve the environment and improve their sustainability profile, so are looking at different options for increasing soil carbon.

Robert Bauer – Moved to Tennessee to be close to girlfriend, but still has a foot in Southwest Badger. He is baffled by the very limited awareness of grazing and benefits thereof in TN. Robert is using knowledge gained from this group to respond. People thought consumers wouldn't be interested in grass-fed beef in Nashville! He issued a call for MPFWG to get to other states – more people need to hear from us. Why are there issues with grazing in TN? It's the heart of the fescue belt, so pastures are often endophyte-infected fescue; but there are ways to deal with that. It hasn't stopped cow/calf producers in east TN. Could grass-finishing and cow/calf production go together in TN in the fescue belt, renovate pastures with something else? Could develop a new industry out of this. Kentucky beef specialist used to be in

WI, working on grass finishing in Lancaster, has continued work in KY. It is a challenge down there because of summer grass quality being low, but TN and KY are two states with perhaps the best opportunity to do year-round grazing.

Discussion of beef marketing cooperative starting to form in Iowa with leadership from PFI:

- Concern re: all the cautionary tales out there of failed meat co-ops. Jane was involved in the Lake Superior Meats Cooperative about 20 years ago. It crashed and burned in 1998. Many reasons why; among them:
 - Not enough financial resources to hire an experienced manager; farmers without the right skills were trying to do the work
 - Not enough financial resources to move forward; farmers in NE MN didn't have enough money to keep it going
 - Burnout among volunteers
 - Personality conflicts on the board; board chair who would fly solo rather than listen to the rest of the board
 - Board members with competing motivations, including desire to sell a large building
 - Donation of animals by members to keep it going; this was not sustainable
- Gene Schriefer has a documentary video of the failed Adirondack Cooperative; he will send it for Jane to distribute to the group.
- Another cautionary tale is the Tallgrass Beef Co-op story.
- Kent – Within the next year or two we should have MPFWG accumulate resources, cautionary tales, things to have available for people thinking towards cooperatives. Have resources for people to spend some time with and make a good decision about whether to do this. Some small dairies are thinking in this direction.
- Laura has documents from her time at WI-DATCP about development of the Wisconsin Grass-fed Beef Co-op, Dairy Grazing collaborative
- Cody Hopkins from Grass Roots Farmers' Cooperative in Arkansas will be speaking to the beef producers in Iowa about cooperative development – farmers are scared about the word cooperative.
- Jim mentioned Thousand Hills Cattle Co. That's a private business, not a co-op.
 - Discussion of the distance farmers must travel to the slaughter plant in Cannon Falls, MN if they want to sell to Thousand Hills. Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships in MN are discussing sales channels for local meat. Transporting animals to Cannon Falls has been difficult for more distant farmers; the allowance per head for transport isn't enough.
 - Wisconsin Grass-Fed Beef also does slaughter in Cannon Falls. It's a 5-hour drive for some to get to Cannon Falls. There's a \$50 per head transport allowance. They tried to use a local processor but had quality of product issues; they couldn't chill product fast enough. Lorentz Meats has a pretty standard set of cuts, but very professional.
- Gene is working with group of poultry producers that received a Value-Added Producer Grant to do a feasibility study on poultry processing. A dairy group trying to do pastured milk alliance. Grass-fed beef is following in footsteps of organic. Experiments by major corporations with finishing cattle under center-pivot irrigation is resulting in tremendous ADGs.

Input on In-Person Meeting: Dovetail off another meeting? Or have our own meeting?

- We need to have adequate time to have our meeting; we put in a solid day; if we piggy-back on another event we need another day.
 - GrassWorks starts at noon or 1 pm, could we meet in the morning?
- With a dedicated meeting in Decorah, we have to schedule far in advance but we can get a full day.
- We have a budget for two in-person meetings per year for the biennium: two in-person meetings per year for two years.
- Group was leaning toward a full-day meeting in Decorah in April rather than trying to dovetail with another meeting.
 - We really get to work if we meet for a full day
 - We spend at least an hour just doing round-robin updates
 - Trying to dovetail with another meeting means shortchanging both of them.

Jane will get a Doodle poll out to set an April meeting date.

Grant funding: What are likely topics?

Kent Solberg – Group housing of dairy replacement heifers on pasture. Very costly to raise them, especially for producers with closed herds it's a dilemma. Brad Heins has done work on group-rearing calves on bedding pack. We could do a project about moving groups of calves out to pasture. Research so far has been on technical production; this would be about capturing economic data re: group-rearing on pasture.

Gene – Similar project is going on in WI.

Meghan – Virtual fencing? ID farms that want to be pilot sites for virtual fence. PFI's interested in this started out of efforts to get contract grazing of cover crops going in Iowa. Cows wearing ear tags or collars, set fence boundary from phone, could revolutionize grazing in row-cropped acres or in wooded areas. Could be awesome to pilot something through MPFWG. Three companies make the technology; they are located in Australia and Norway. Inquiries to these companies have been met with silence.

Gene – Folks who have tried virtual fencing have seen an issue with cattle blasting through the fence right away because there's no visual barrier. They have to get trained into it.

You need a perimeter fence to prevent escapes, and use virtual fence for interior divisions. It will likely work best as a management tool, not a containment tool. That makes it less useful for crop residue grazing, because the issue there is no fences remain at all.

Kent – When you talk about fencing, people mentally default to 5-strand barbed wire. No one wants to do that. Do we need to do fence workshops in IA, to show people modern fence technology? Once people put their hands on it, they are amazed; it's life-changing. Farmers don't have the fence-building skill set; it's being lost as new generations grow up with no fences.

Gene – When we used to be able to track online usage of Extension publications, fencing publications were the most-viewed and most-downloaded. Could we put together a road map for developing videos and getting them on YouTube, showing how to build cornerposts, other fence topics like what's a good energizer? What's a good groundfield?

Meghan – posted a blog post about how to build a high-tensile fence; it was the most-viewed post on PFI blog. It would be good to have these materials on the MPFWG website.

On high-visibility roads, could we build some example fences, and put up signs to highlight modern fence technology? Where do you locate these to get the visibility you want?

Discussion of Pasture Project videos re: fence technology; there were videos produced but they seem to be inaccessible. Elizabeth noted that Pasture Project does have access to the videos and will look into making sure they are available online.

Mini-grants:

- We have \$10,000 and could go up to \$5,000 max for two mini-grants.
 - \$2,500 or \$5,000 would be a useful amount of money for some projects
 - Probably not enough for videography unless we did some low-budget videos edited with available software
- To evaluate grant proposals we would need:
 - a budget breakdown
 - a proposal scoring system

Motion by Kent, second by Denise to move forward on mini-grants.

Try to issue an RFP by January 15 with February 28 deadline; conference call to discuss & decide in March. Jane will work on developing an RFP.

Doodle poll to set next meeting – January or February -ish

Doodle poll for April mtg. (Jim not available April 7 – 17.)