

Midwest Perennial Forage Working Group

February 6, 2019 conference call

Present:

Jane Jewett

Brad Heins

Jacob Grace

Gene Schriefer

Doug Gucker

Laura Paine

Meghan Filbert

Robert Bauer

Pete Huff

Terry VanDerPol

Kent Solberg

Erin Meier

Laura Paine – GrassWorks conference last week, had about 400 attend although some had trouble getting there because of cold. Laura coordinated the Dairy track. Offered a 1-hour session using RMA grant materials and handed out fact sheets. DGA received a large, 3-year USDA grant to work with veterans. We just hired a new employee as veteran liaison: a DGA apprentice from NW WI, 24-yr Army retiree, will be working to recruit, coach, & support veterans through the program. Also expanding into new states: SFA partnership in MN, new partnership in VT with Univ of VT, adding Michigan State this spring.

Brad Heins – Really cold, doing a lot of outwintering work to try to rejuvenate pastures. We are working a lot with genetics for grazing animals, working with herds in MN and WI to improve genetic programs for grazing. Will be working on shade opportunities with grazing animals, grass species under shade structures. Speaking about grazing in WI and Denmark in coming months.

Laura – Just had conversation re: not enough research on crop research & genetics in dairy cows, so great to hear Brad is working on it.

Doug Gucker – Coming up Mar 7, NW IL grazing conference, Gene Schriefer will be speaking at it. That's about it for IL.

Megan Filbert – PFI conference 3 weeks ago. Most exciting things around grazing & livestock – Diane Mayerfeld, Keefe Keeley were speakers re: silvopasture w/ 75 attendees. Tonight is the last speaking event for Grazing Cover Crops for Profit; I have given 6 presentations over past few months. Was at GrassWorks conference to speak. Hoping to get 4 to 5 grazing groups around Iowa off the ground in April or May. PFI is working on niche meat marketing efforts; thinking about co-ops or private enterprises; have critical mass to do some sort of aggregation, trying to figure out best business model.

Gene Schriefer – Week before GrassWorks we had the Driftless Beef Conference, 3-state IA, IL, WI. Keynote was writer for Beef magazine; consistent message was "Graze More." Farmers are being encouraged to get good at grazing. Gene coordinated a beef marketing panel. IA State people talked re:

marketing of beef. In Dec, worked w/ Extension farm team on Resilient Farms conference @ WI Dells. Lots of beef and dairy producers attended; grazing dairy & beef was prominent; lots of discussion re: contract grazing. WI Farmers Union & Compeer were co-sponsors. Lots of dairies are going out of business. I dealt with four conversions to grazing last year; we'll see if they survive. Even some of the stubborn ones are taking another look at grazing because they're barely hanging on. SW Grasslands Association has a part-time person hired to try to coordinate more outreach to landowners re: more grazing in SW corner of state. The WI DNR has led the effort for 15 years with nothing to show for it, but now it's being led by private organizations so maybe hope for change. As dairies have gone out of business, land has been split up into rural residences. Iowa & Vernon counties are working at putting farms back together to get grazing on enough land to make it worthwhile. Tyson Foods – Cactus Feeders partnership/Kit Pharo to raise grass-fed cattle on pastures under irrigation rather than through feedlots. Did find some genetic differences. Big beef industry is getting interested in grass-fed beef. Good they are recognizing it as a marketing opportunity; bad for small-scale grass-fed beef producers because competition from the big industry players will drive price down.

Robert Bauer – Conservation Planning Boot Camp w/scholarships available thru state associations of conservation districts. Incredible opportunity. Soil Conservationists from NRCS, especially early-career, are hungry to learn re: grazing and soil conservation. Robert led a group that stopped and visited one of Meghan's projects. Standardizing planning process for farms getting into grazing. Look at resource base, goals, practices, make a recommendation. Coordinating w/ Gene doing trainings for agency staff thru a SARE-PDP grant obtained by GrassWorks, Kristen Jurecek. Some DGA mentors came down for the training; was very helpful. Need to do it again this March. Uncertainty w/ SW Badger. It has a new E.D., Becky Olson. She's managing efforts across 9 counties in SW WI; Robert needs to have communication with her re: Grazing Broker, other initiatives. Really important to get agency staff to hear directly from grazing farmers.

Laura – As part of the GrassWorks project, Kristen Jurecek is really doing a great job of getting the attention of the agency staff. Meeting for Columbia-Dodge Grazing group; covers a few additional counties now; working on reconstituting this group.

Jacob Grace – Was inspired after PFI & GrassWorks conferences. Starting to come into focus re: what he'll be working on. Coordinate & support existing grazing networks in WI, revive some that were more active in the past, that's something he'll be working on from Madison. Doesn't have local connections with graziers, but could be the person who acts as a coordinator, writes grants, etc. Working on SCBG w/ Savanna Institute, program for people with orchards to integrate livestock into orchards while meeting food safety requirements (FSMA).

Pete Huff – Elisabeth is in Alabama doing training on Soil & Water Assessment Tool. Grazing Cover Crop Resources & Videos were released in January; this was a project with LSP, PFI, SFA. Continued grazing cover crop on-farm data collection with farmers in IL & MO, applying learnings from project in IA and MN. Will continue through 2020. Continuing work with WI DNR, also crossing paths with Jacob re: grazing projects with land managers & technicians and Univ of WI on grazing sites. Additional adaptive grazing videos coming out soon using footage from other projects. Anders Gjerda is working with Pasture Project on the videos. Doing background research on different models, approaches to engaging audiences re: grazing, new practices; creating a white paper, would like to circulate that to a larger

audience. Pasture Project is trying to learn how best to interact with different audiences and be good partners.

Terry VanDerPol – LSP has had a Soil Health program in SE MN for past year, growing across the state and going well re: grazing & soil health. Working w/ non-operating landowners (NOLOs) in southern part of MN, focused not just on women but a broader classification of NOLOs. Finding a lot of interest among NOLOs who want to up their game re: conservation & stewardship; interest in getting livestock back on the land; interested in finding ways for renters & NOLOs to talk to each other on these topics. Also engaging w/ livestock producers re: beef producers and concerns re: processing. We are in a near-crisis in MN for access to processing for farmers marketing 50 head of cattle per year or less. Processors are going away at an alarming rate.

Kent Solberg – Getting lots of mileage out of RMA project; doing another session at the SFA conference this Saturday Feb. 9. Have a soil management conference next week; 8 café chats coming up around MN, Midwest Soil Health summit in March; Brad & Kent did low-input dairy workshop in Dec. and was so well-received they are doing another one in March. Had four Ranching for Profit workshops with Dave Pratt in December. With the administration change we have lost a pro-grazing MN DNR commissioner; not sure if the new one will be pro-grazing or if it will be a priority. Looking for experienced new, beginning dairy operator to take over the Solberg farm in stages to start a grass-fed dairy. DGA may know someone.

GLBW Update:

Erin Meier

Funded deliverables intersecting with MPFWG.

Really getting focused about launching the new GLBW website. Hoping within 2 weeks to roll out a complete website and have a better online presence.

A lot of what we're doing right now is tedious process and organizational things. We are trying to assess where work is happening that doesn't need us, and where can GLBW add value. Touching base with foundational documents, creating templates re: who we are now. A Steering Committee meeting is scheduled for March in Decorah; Jane and Meghan will be there. Need to quickly start bringing together pieces for a 2019 GLBW Conference. We have funding from McKnight and Walton; some related grants are funding parts of Aaron's time.

Forever Green continues to increase its outward-facing communications, Dean Brian Buhr has now embraced the initiative and paired it with the agricultural technology "GEMS" unit working on big data. Interest from Walton & McKnight in supporting that; should bring more funding for perennial work with Forever Green; GLBW is alongside it as an outreach arm.

Workplan & Budget

Travel budget for in-person meeting and potentially other events, conference

Mini-Grants

Mini-grants could now be accomplished. Might have to call these “contracts” rather than grants, but we can use the protocol developed by MPFWG in 2016 because it does mesh very well with GLBW priorities.

GLBW does need MPFWG to produce some deliverables that hit GLBW priorities, but what we already have in place as MPFWG priorities do fit into the GLBW priorities. MPFWG is under the GLBW umbrella and funded by GLBW.

Framing the mini-grant protocol: we could use this to provide extra support to boost or enhance activities that MPFWG members are already doing, rather than being an exclusively GLBW project.

Timeline: Put an RFP process in place and discuss proposals at end of April? That’s getting tight for people to plan something for the summer. Also a tight timeline to try to put a whole RFP process in place and get applications in and approved before April, but it’s worth trying to do it. End of June 2020 is deadline for most of the work; we could stretch one contract out to end of 2020. Even if it’s short timing now for summer activities, we could think about something for winter conferences.

Buffet of reports on ongoing projects to have at 2019 conference?

Range of funding: \$10,000 in contract bucket. We were talking about \$5,000 mini-grants, so we could do one larger or two smaller ones. We could have some of that \$ go toward bringing in speakers for an event; could supplement salary; could pay for services someone brings in; could be a meeting we want to hold or something on-farm.

Discussion on RFP:

- Get it off the ground this year, evaluate it and see if we need to make tweaks to it.
- The protocol is pretty specific; there’s enough there to run with.
- Require a cash-match for the application?
 - Don’t want to make people go into contortions & play games. We all know we’re all connected.
 - Could be useful to be able to report in-kind or \$ leveraged for GLBW’s purposes. Could do that with post-award reporting.
- Keep this internal to our group this year.
- Put together a proposal based on the mini-grant protocol
- Max \$5,000; effective way of partnering with other members of the working group.

Will this add too much to our agenda for the April meeting? Could have a deadline of early April and discuss them before the meeting; or put together a subcommittee to review these; but we won’t know who is on the subcommittee until we know who is going to submit ideas.

Protocol from 2016 said we would put this into a Google form and allow everyone to score proposals except the ones they are involved in. Jane & Erin – work on little bit more formal process, get it out before beginning of April with a deadline. Maybe have another conference call to help people hammer out some more ideas about grant proposal ideas.

Logistics for the spring face-to-face meeting in Decorah:

9 am to 3:30 pm, travel support through hotel & mileage reimbursement. Make your own hotel arrangements and submit for reimbursement after the meeting.

Agenda:

Round Robin Updates

GLBW workplan

Deeper dives into conference/workshop learnings

Grant applications?

PFI, MN Grazing Exchange, SW Badger – Grazing Exchanges conversation

GLBW Conference in November – session planning; theme

Mini-grant discussion