

MOUNTAINS-TO-BAY GRAZING ALLIANCE



News & Notes from the Mountains-to-Bay Grazing Alliance

July 2016

Grazing School Hosted in Virginia

by J.B. Daniel, Forage and Grassland Agronomist, USDA-NRCS

The Virginia Forage and Grassland Council (VFGC) 2016 Grazing School held on May 2 and 3, 2016, was a tremendous success. This two-day intensive learning experience was hosted at the Shenandoah Valley Agricultural Research and Extension Center in Steele's Tavern, Virginia. Thirty-five farmers attended this session from different regions of Virginia as well as from North Carolina, West Virginia, and even one from New York City.

Participants were welcomed to fields of green grass and beautiful scenery with the back drop of the Blue Ridge Mountains. The course included classroom style presentations on soils, fertility, stocking rates, forage supply, forage quality, and grazing economics. These were balanced with outdoor sessions where participants learned plant identification, pasture condition scoring, and estimating standing biomass. A pasture walk, led by David Fiske, showed some of the ongoing research occurring at the farm: comparing different stock densities and varying levels of grazing management.



Participants at the Virginia Forage and Grassland Council Grazing School gets hands-on instruction about grazing practices.

Everyone also had the opportunity to see and discuss the differences in portable fence posts and electric wire for maximizing the flexibility of their grazing systems. Other sessions included body condition scoring of beef cattle, visually evaluating hay samples, and the importance of analyzing samples to determine the actual nutritional quality of these feed sources.

The course wrapped up with a one-on-one session of participants with instructors outlining their farm goals and summarizing farm information

to develop a plan of action for their personal farm operation. The participants enjoyed meeting each other, interacting with the instructors, and learning the core concepts of forage and grazing management in this interactive and personal setting.

Congratulations to this class of grazing school graduates and we look forward to seeing them (and others) at regional summer field days and at the American Forage and Grassland Council Annual Meeting in Roanoke, Virginia this coming January 23 and 24, 2017. Mark your calendar and watch for more information on the agenda and registration details this summer.

VFGC is fortunate to have a dedicated group of Board members consisting of producers, agency, industry, and educational advisors who work together to teach these grazing schools. The grazing school was a partnership event with Virginia Tech, Virginia Cooperative Extension, USDA-NRCS, and the Chesapeake Bay Foundation and was partially funding by this Conservation Innovation Grant.

Technical and Financial Assistance Available for Grazing Operations

by Susan Parry, State Grassland Conservationist for Pennsylvania and
Brianna Mason, Grazing Project Assistant

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides both technical and financial assistance to producers who understand our mission to improve Pennsylvania's grazing lands. We have professional staff that can work with landowners to develop a conservation plan, with their operations goals and objectives taken into full consideration along with conservation benefits such as water quality and soil health. The technical assistance provided through our planning and grazing specialist staff is provided free of charge. We also have financial assistance programs that provide an incentive payment to fulfill the objectives of a conservation plan for farmers that qualify. Listed below are "grazer friendly" financial assistance programs that NRCS provides.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

EQIP promotes farm and forest production by enhancing the environment through increased soil, water, air, plant, and animal quality. Agreements under the EQIP program range from two to ten years long, with compensation provided to cover the cost of implementing the desired conservation practice on the producers' land.

Eligible landowners are individuals, groups, or entities who own or manage farmland, pastureland, or non-industrial forestland. Beginning, limited-resource, socially disadvantaged, and veteran farmers can be eligible for higher compensation rates.

Under contract, applicants are required to complete an application, as well as the eligibility paperwork that is also required. Once approved, producers sign an EQIP contract, therefore agreeing to implement the desired conservation practices and maintain the practice to NRCS technical standards for its life span.



NRCS programs can help pay for fencing to keep cattle out of streams.

Common conservation practices that could be installed are:

- Animal Waste Storage Facilities
- Grazing Systems
- Conservation Tillage
- Nutrient Management
- Erosion Control
- Water Quality Practices
- Forest Management Practices
- Pest Management
- Wildlife Habitat
- Streambank Fencing

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

CSP provides both financial and technical assistance to conservationists who wish to enhance soil, water, air, and other natural resources on their production. The goal of the CSP program is to encourage producers to improve their conservation practices by installing and adopting new activities while maintaining their existing activities on their operation. Not only does CSP focus on agricultural land, but also on non-industrial private forest land.

Being that not all applicants can be accepted, applicants are evaluated relative to others by comparing producers' primary resource concerns.

When under a CSP contract, producers have two possible payment options. First, an annual payment for installing and adopting additional activities and improving, maintaining, and managing existing activities. The second option is receiving a

supplemental payment for adopting resource conserving crop rotations.

Lands that are eligible include cropland, pastureland, rangeland, non-industrial private forestland, land under the jurisdiction of a Native American or Tribal Nation, or any other private agricultural land.

Common enhancements include the following:

- Soil Health Practices
- Diverse Cover Crop Mixes
- Intensive Rotational Grazing Management Systems
- Hardwood Crop Tree Release
- Other Advanced Management Activities

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

CRP is a program that aims to reduce soil erosion, protect the nation's production of food and fiber, reduce stream and lake sedimentation, improve water quality, establish



NRCS programs can help pay for installation of buffers, which help filter polluted runoff.

wildlife habitat, and enhance forest and wetland resources. The intent of CRP is to encourage farmers to convert highly erodible cropland or other sensitive acreage into land of vegetative cover. Cover of this land could include native grasses, wildlife plantings, trees, grass filter strips, or riparian buffers. Agreements for this program last from ten to fifteen years.

Eligible land owners are those who

have owned and operated eligible cropland for at least twelve months. Cropland must meet cropping history requirements and be physically and legally capable of being planted with an agricultural commodity.

Common installed practices include the following:

- Riparian Buffers
- Streambank Fencing
- Stream Crossings
- Upland Wildlife Habitat Management

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)

ACEP is a program that provides financial and technical assistance to help conserve agricultural lands and wetlands, as well as their associated benefits. Under an ACEP agreement, NRCS helps Indian tribes, state and local governments, and nongovernmental organizations protect the working agricultural lands and limit non-agricultural uses of the

land. This is a relatively new program, which combines three former programs: Wetlands Reserve Program, Grassland Reserve Program, and the Farm and Ranchland Protection Program.



NRCS programs can help pay to establish intensive rotational grazing management systems.

The easements that are entered into under this agreement are ones that are protecting the long-term viability of our nation's food supply by preventing the conversion of productive working lands to non-agricultural uses. NRCS will contribute up to fifty percent of

the easement's fair market value.

Eligible owners are those that have cropland, rangeland, grassland, pastureland, and nonindustrial private forest land. Applicants are prioritized by the agricultural uses and related conservation values of the land and those that maximize the protection of contiguous acres devoted to agricultural uses.

Common installed practices include the following:

- Improved Grazing Techniques
- Advanced IPM
- Pasture and Hay Land Planting
- Fencing
- Watering Facility
- Animal Trails and Walkways
- Forest Harvest Management
- Continuous No-Till

To get additional information on programs and agreements through USDA NRCS, check out the website at: www.nrcs.usda.gov or visit your local field office.

Farmer Profile: Scott Plein of White House Farm Foundation

by Bobby Whitescarver



Scott Plein on his farm in Luray, Virginia

“The way to get things done is to lead by example,” says Scott Plein, founder of White House Farm Foundation, White House Natives, and owner of three farms he has converted from water-fouling land uses to sustainable engines of hope for restoring the Chesapeake Bay.

Before Plein bought Long Road Farm near Luray, Virginia, the beef operation there had been deemed a “founded” complaint under the Agricultural Stewardship Act of Virginia. The farm had a giant cattle feedlot with a stream running through it, causing polluted runoff to flow into the South Fork of the Shenandoah River.

Plein bought the farm in 2012, and he immediately removed the feedlot, fenced off the stream, installed riparian buffers, and stabilized the eroding stream banks. He worked with the Shenandoah Valley Soil and Water Conservation District and the local office of the Natural Resources Conservation Service to design and install the conservation practices.

“Cost share programs and technical assistance make it easy to take care of the land and the water,” Plein explains.

Today the farm is a stellar example of sustainability with stream exclusion fences, stream buffers, and 11 grazing units that facilitate rotational grazing. Two of the grazing units will be planted in native warm season grasses that will provide forage during July and August, the two months that most cool season pastures go dormant because of the heat.

“My background is in turf management,” Plein says. “The more

you cut turf, the better it gets. I saw a direct relationship with turf management and rotational grazing. Continuous grazing just doesn't provide the best or most amount of forage for cattle, but rotational grazing does.”

In addition to setting a conservation example for stream fencing and rotational grazing, Plein founded White House Farm Foundation, an educational non-profit fostering sustainable land uses, and White House Natives, a wholesale nursery that grows only Virginia native trees and shrubs.

“My farms produce cattle, grain, hay, nursery stock, clean water, and wildlife,” Plein says. “And they make more money now per acre than when they had feedlots and polluted runoff.”

Scott Plein: proving every day that working farmers can be great producers and great conservationists.

Maryland Events

STREAM FIELD DAY

Tuesday, August 30, 3:30-6:30 p.m.
Liberty Delight Farms, Reisterstown, MD
Come tour farmer Shane Hughes' all-natural meat and egg production operation that maintains viability while protecting Maryland waterways. The Maryland Department of Agriculture's Water Quality Program helped Shane fence off his stream, build stream crossings, and install gravity flow facilities. Learn how to implement similar practices on your farm without breaking the bank. Register by clicking here to go to Future Harvest CASA's website.

BACKYARD WOODLAND WORKSHOP

Thursday, September 29 and October 6
6:30 p.m.-9:00 p.m.
University of Maryland Extension
Howard County Office
3300 North Ridge Road, Suite 240
Ellicott City, MD
Learn how to better manage the natural areas on your property or convert some lawn into natural areas. Registration fee is \$25 per individual and \$30 per couple. To register, contact Georgia Eacker at geacker@umd.edu.

If you need more information on grazing in Maryland, please contact Michael Heller at mheller@cbf.org or Jeff Semler at jsemler@umd.edu.

Pennsylvania Events

PASTURE WALK

Thursday, July 7, 5:30-8:30 p.m.
Allen Dixon's Farm
627 Grazierville Road, Tyrone, PA
Learn about balancing management for a productive beef operation. Dinner will be provided. Please RSVP to Beth Futrick at 814/696-0877 x113 or at bfutrick@blairconservationdistrict.org.

DIGESTION SYSTEM AND NUTRITION FIELD DAY

Saturday, July 9, 9:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.
Delaware Valley University Equestrian Center
700 East Butler Avenue, Doylestown, PA
Come out for a fun, hands-on, and educational field day about the horse's digestion system and management

of horse's nutrition. To reserve a spot, contact Samantha Lawrence at lawrencesm6751@delval.edu or Abigail Marushak at marushaka6325@delval.edu.

GRAZING LANDS COALITION PASTURE WALK

Wednesday, July 13
10:00 a.m.-3:15 p.m.
K Bar K Farm
5867 Eberle Road, Petersburg, PA
Pasture walk and grazing system discussion led by owners Ken and Kathy Soder. Learn about flock genetics for a commercial forage-based system. Lunch will be provided. Please RSVP to Susan Parry at susan.parry@pa.usda.gov.

INTRO TO INVASIVES: WEEDS, TREES, AND PESTS

Friday, July 15, 9:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m.
Disaster's Edge
138 Park Road, St. Michael, PA
Learn about weed control, forest pests, and invasive and noxious weed identification (among other topics). Lunch will be provided. Please RSVP at 814/472-2120.

GRAZING MANAGEMENT IN A CHANGING CLIMATE

Saturday, July 23, 11:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m.
Walnut Hill Farm
4965 Saranac Drive, Sharpsville, PA
Join the Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture (PASA) for an exploration of Grazing Strategies in a Changing Climate. Click here to register.

SOIL HEALTH CONFERENCE

Thursday, July 28, 4:00-8:00 p.m. &
Friday, July 29 7:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m.
Grange Fairgrounds, Building 13
W. Potter Street. Centre Hall, PA
We will explore techniques to grow soil health by increasing the periods of the year that farm fields are populated by living roots. Click here to register.

ADAPTIVE GRAZING/SOIL HEALTH FIELD DAY

Saturday, July 30, 8:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.
Darlington Township Municipal Building,
3590 Darlington Road, Darlington, PA
Learn how to manage resources to improve profitability and reduce inputs. Contact Jeff Leindecker with the Beaver

County Conservation District at jeff.leindecker@bccdpa.us to register.

PASTURE WALK

Tuesday, August 9, 10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.
Wilmer Kuhns Farm
Chambersburg, PA
For more information, contact Titus Martin at tilinmartin@embargmail.com or titus.martin@pa.usda.gov.

AG PROGRESS DAYS

August 16-18, 2016
Russell E. Larson Agricultural Research Center, Penn State
Come visit Pennsylvania's largest outdoor agricultural exposition. For more information, visit www.agsci.psu.edu/apd.

GRAZING DAIRY COW, HEALTH & GENETICS: BEYOND THE BASICS

Saturday, August 20
9:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m.
Douglassville, PA
Email Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture's Aaron Long at aaron@pasafarming.org for more information.

If you need more information on grazing in Pennsylvania, please contact Red Barn Consulting at 717/393-2176 or Capital RC&D at 717/241-4361.

Virginia Events

SUMMER FORAGE TOUR: PLANNING FOR DROUGHT

Thursday, September 1
Beck-n-Rich Farm
Borden Grant Trail, Fairfield, VA and at Virginia Tech McCormick Farm
128 McCormick Farm Circle
Raphine, VA
Pre-tour at Beck-n-Rich Farm featuring forage sorghums for silage and baleage. Dinner at McCormick Farm followed by tour on summer stockpiling for late-summer grazing, crabgrass, lespedeza, and summer annual forages building drought resistance with healthy soils. Contact Matt Booher at 540/245-5750 or mrbooher@vt.edu to register.

If you need more information on grazing in Virginia, please contact Alston Horn at 540/487-9060 or Matt Booher at 540/245-5750.

An Exciting Opportunity for New Grazers

The Mountains-To-Bay Grazing Alliance is seeking volunteers (one farm in Virginia and one farm in Maryland) to serve as “case study” farms we can use to demonstrate and quantify the environmental and economic benefits of converting to more intensive grazing systems. Specifically, we are interested in producers that have recently, or soon will be, transitioning from continuous grazing to a more intensive system or from grain-fed to a grass-based system.

For the case study farms, we will be:

- Collecting agronomic information and then using on-farm calculators to estimate nutrient loads and greenhouse gas emissions associated with a producer's current practices and operations (“before”) and then “after” implementing a more intensive grazing system;
- Collecting soil samples to measure organic matter, pH, water capacity, and other parameters to estimate “soil health” in one field before and after conversion;
- Evaluating farm scale economic changes by analyzing costs for feed, fertilizer, fuel, veterinary bills, milk production, etc.

Your farm's experiences will be very helpful as other farms are considering or making a transition to rotational grazing. A generous stipend will be provided. If you are interested, in Virginia contact Alston Horn at 540/487-9060 or ahorn@cbf.org and in Maryland, contact Rob Schnabel at 443/482-2175 or rschnabel@cbf.org.

Pasture Walks

We are in the planning stages for pasture walks geared for producers interested in rotational grazing in the following Maryland counties: Garrett (dairy), Allegany (beef), Washington (dairy and beef), Frederick (dairy), and Carroll (dairy). No dates have been set. If you are interested in participating in one of these two-hour walks, email jschloss46@yahoo.com.

Announcements from Future Harvest CASA

We're Looking for a Few Good Grazers!

Experienced Grazers: We're looking for experienced grazers to become Trainers for Future Harvest CASA's first year Beginning Farmer Training Program (you will receive a trainee at your farm one day a week for approximately seven months).

Experienced Grazers: We're looking for experienced grazers to become Grazing Consultants for the FHCASA's new intermediate Mentorship program (stipend provided).

Intermediate-Level Grazing Mentees: We're looking for intermediate-level grazers to receive the benefit of resources and a mentor in our new Intermediate-Level Mentorship Program.

If you are interested in any of these opportunities, please contact Sarah Sohn at sarah@futureharvestcasa.org.

Calling Amazing Grazers!

Future Harvest CASA has launched an online Amazing Grazing Directory map found at www.futureharvestcasa.org. This new, online map makes it possible for you to market your grass-fed products directly to consumers in your geographical region. If you would like to add your grass-based farm to the online Amazing Grazing map, please contact Rob Schnabel at rschnabel@cbf.org or Shannon Varley at shannon@futureharvestcasa.org.

Future Harvest CASA 2017 Conference: Accepting Proposals

Are you a grass farmer with an innovative management strategy? Have you experienced a pitfall or a success that you would like to share with your fellow grass farmers? The Future Harvest CASA 2017 Conference (being held January 12-14, 2017 in College Park, Maryland) is looking for workshop proposals for our Grassfed: Meat and Dairy Track and we would love to have you!

Please submit your workshop proposal [HERE!](#)

Questions? Email Shannon at shannon@futureharvestcasa.org or Rob at rschnabel@cbf.org.

Mountains-to-Bay Grazing Alliance Partnership

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