



The Future of Managed Grazing:

Barriers to managed grazing in Wisconsin and how to overcome them

Jeanne Merrill, MFAI Policy Organizer

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For additional copies of the report, please contact:
Michael Fields Agricultural Institute
262-642-3303 extension 4

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Executive Summary

Dairy farming represents a significant portion of Wisconsin's agricultural economy. A 2004 study found that the dairy industry accounts for 40 percent of the state's \$51.5 billion agricultural economy¹. However, declining numbers of dairy producers threaten to undermine this sector of the state's economy². Consequently, there has been much effort in the state to increase the number of dairy producers – from beginning farmer programs, state grant programs for dairy modernization, to tax incentives.

One successful strategy for keeping dairy farmers on the land, and financially profitable is the practice of managed grazing. Studies show that by rotating cows through pasture for their primary forage, farmers can reduce their input and labor costs, and increase profits. Farmers who practice managed grazing are also found to be more satisfied with their lifestyles, compared to their conventional counterparts. And, finally, managed grazing offers a host of environmental benefits – from decreased soil erosion, and nutrient run-off, to increased wildlife habitat. Currently, close to a quarter of the state's dairy producers practice managed grazing.

Given the economic, social, and environmental benefits of managed grazing, the Michael Fields Agricultural Institute (MFAI) and many grazing advocates are interested to understand what constrains its wider broader use. Why do many conventional Wisconsin farmers not include managed grazing in their farm operation? What obstacles do beginning farmers face when starting grazing farms? What policy remedies might support farmers transitioning to managed grazing in Wisconsin?

To answer these questions we used qualitative research methods. We conducted 38 interviews, including 11 conventional farmers, 9 graziers, and 18 agricultural professionals (e.g. grazing specialists, university researchers, Extension agents, etc). We asked questions that related to perceptions of managed grazing, and what prevents conventional and beginning farmers from practicing managed grazing (see Appendix B for a list of interview questions). We also attended

¹ Deller, S. March 2004. *Wisconsin and the Agricultural Economy*. Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics. University of Wisconsin-Madison. <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/ag/wisag/>

² For more information on declining WI dairy farmers, got to: <http://www.pats.wisc.edu/widtrends.htm>

a meeting of the Southeast Wisconsin Grazing Network where we listened and asked questions of the participants.

Findings

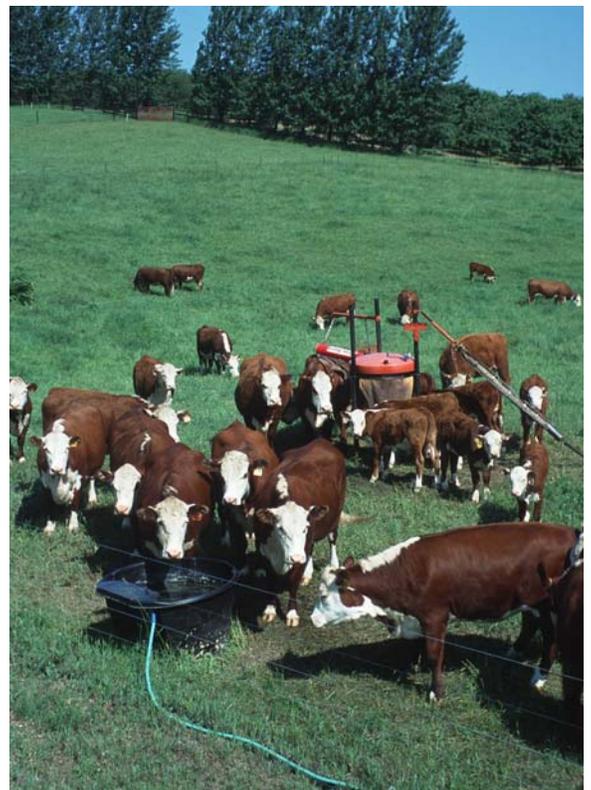
We found the following barriers to managed grazing for conventional dairy farmers:

Debt load: The debt load of the average Wisconsin dairy farmer does not limit his ability to switch to managed grazing, but how a conventional farmer perceives the economics of managed grazing may limit his interest in the system. Farmers with a high debt structure may not be able to successfully transition to managed grazing or any other new system, because of severely limited cash flow.

Land: Most conventional farmers will have adequate land to transition to managed grazing. However, some farmers appear to be unfamiliar with the acreage needed to design a successful grazing operation, and they may assume managed grazing operations require more land than is necessary. In some regions of the state, high land prices may act as a real constraint for those few farmers who will need to purchase or rent additional land to successfully transition their farms to managed grazing.

Measures of Success: Making the transition to thinking about success in terms of profitability, instead of high herd averages, may be a barrier for some conventional dairy farmers in making the switch to managed grazing.

Practicality & Lifestyle: Other reasons given by the conventional dairy farmers we interviewed for not considering managed grazing related to perceptions of the practicality of grazing and its fit with their lifestyle.



We found the following barriers to managed grazing among beginning farmers:

Land: For many beginning farmers, access to land to establish their farm can be difficult, but we found unique challenges in accessing land for beginning farmers interested in practicing managed grazing. For young, beginning farmers, who come from a farm background, it may be difficult to convince the older generation to transition the family farm to managed grazing. Additionally, it may be difficult to find a retiring farmer who is familiar with managed grazing and its benefits, and is willing to rent to a beginning grazier.

Capital: In establishing a managed grazing farm on rented land, a beginning grazier may have to purchase fences, develop lanes, and improve old facilities. But he may lack a secure lease, increasing his financial risk. Additionally, securing loans can be challenging for beginning graziers. According to some we interviewed, convincing a banker to make a loan to a beginning grazier for the capital needed to start a grazing operation can be difficult and take persistence.

Experience: It is critical that beginning graziers gain classroom and on-farm experience before they start their own grazing operations. Many of the agricultural professionals we interviewed raised concerns that there are not enough opportunities to receive classroom instruction and on-farm experience before beginning farmers start out on their own grazing operation. Furthermore, many beginning farmers, particularly those that come from a non-farm background, may not be aware of the opportunities in Wisconsin where they can gain experience.

Recommendations

Wisconsin is a leader in managed grazing, but significant gaps in pasture-based farming systems education, research, technical assistance, and funding still persist in the state. We recommend the following:

- Create financial transitions teams to conduct outreach and educate on managed grazing economics and financial planning

- Increase participatory research on managed grazing at the University of Wisconsin-Madison
- Develop managed grazing curriculum for the University of Wisconsin, technical colleges, and high schools
- Expand on-farm training and equity-building opportunities for beginning graziers
- Increase DATCP's FarmLink program's capacity to assist retiring and beginning farmers
- Secure funding for Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative by increasing state funding
- Eliminate unintentional barriers to managed grazing farms participation in federal programs
- Increase federal support for managed grazing

Chapter 1

Introduction

Managed grazing has entered the mainstream of Wisconsin's dairy industry. No longer is the practice of rotating cows through pasture for their primary forage an alternative form of dairy farming. By 2003, nearly a quarter of the state's dairy farmers practiced managed grazing³. And for many beginning farmers, grazing offers an affordable way to get into dairying. The mainstreaming of managed grazing can be attributed to its multiple benefits, including sound financial performance, satisfying family lifestyles, and good land stewardship.

Financial studies by University of Wisconsin (UW)-Madison and UW-Extension researchers support farmer views that managed grazing makes good economic sense. The researchers reviewed eight years of financial information from Wisconsin dairy farms⁴. They found that grazing farms were more profitable per cow and per hundredweight equivalent⁵ than their confinement counterparts. Additionally, managed grazing farms had higher net incomes per hundredweight equivalent than traditional and larger modern confinement farms in Wisconsin⁶. Researchers found that farmers, who convert to managed grazing, can make the switch without suffering financial hardship during the transition.



Research suggests farmers who practice managed grazing tend to be more satisfied with their lifestyles than other farmers. A survey conducted by the Program on Agricultural

³ Taylor, J and Foltz, J. January 2006. *Grazing in the dairy state: Pasture use in the Wisconsin dairy industry, 1993 – 2003*. University of Wisconsin-Madison.

⁴ Kriegl, T and McNair, R. February 2005. *Pastures of plenty: Financial performance of Wisconsin grazing dairy farms*. University of Wisconsin-Madison.

⁵ Hundredweight equivalent is defined in Kriegl and McNair's study as: "an indexing procedure which focuses on the primary product that is sold and standardizes farms in terms of milk price and many other variables for analysis purposes." Page 2. Kriegl and McNair. February 2005.

⁶ Ibid.

Sidebar: Definition of managed grazing. There are different terms for managed grazing, including rotational grazing and management intensive grazing. For this report, we borrow definitions of managed grazing, and the farmers who practice it, from a recent report by the UW-Madison’s Center for Integrated Agricultural System (CIAS) and PATS:

*Management intensive grazing (MIG), or **managed grazing**, is a system in which dairy farmers rely on pasture as the primary source of forages for their milk cows during the grazing months and move these cows to fresh pasture at least once a week. The farmers who use this management system are called **graziers**.* (page 2, Taylor and Foltz 2006):

Technology Studies (PATS) of UW-Madison found that graziers in 2003 “were less likely to be ‘very dissatisfied’ than stored feed farmers and more likely to be ‘very satisfied’ than other farmers”⁷.

Finally, managed grazing can benefit the environment⁸. By keeping cows on pasture and rotating them frequently through paddocks, the cows spread their own manure; which can lower, and, in many cases, eliminate the need for chemical fertilizers. Consequently, managed grazing can reduce nutrient run-off, which helps protect Wisconsin’s water quality. Turning cropland into pasture for managed grazing can also increase wildlife habitat, reduce soil erosion, and reduce the need for pesticides. Because of its permanent ground cover, managed grazing reduces the need for federal funding to mitigate environmental effects of nutrient run-off; therefore, saving taxpayers money.

Given the economic, social, and environmental benefits of managed grazing, the Michael Fields Agricultural Institute (MFAI) and many grazing advocates are interested to understand what constrains its wider broader use. Why do many conventional Wisconsin farmers not include managed grazing in their farm operation? What obstacles do beginning farmers face when

⁷ Page 9. Taylor, J and Foltz, J. January 2006.

⁸ A study by the Union of Concerned Scientists on the health benefits of grass-fed beef includes a literature review of the environmental benefits of managed grazing. For more on this see: Clancy, K. March 2006. *Greener Pastures: How grass-fed beef and milk contribute to health eating*. Union of Concerned Scientists. <http://www.ucsusa.org/publications/>

starting grazing farms? What policy remedies might support farmers transitioning to managed grazing in Wisconsin? These are the questions we set out to answer in our study.

Methodology

Using qualitative research methods, we conducted 38 interviews, including 11 conventional dairy and beef farmers, 9 graziers, and 18 agricultural professionals (e.g. grazing specialists, university researchers, Extension agents, etc). We asked questions that related to perceptions of managed grazing and what prevents conventional and beginning farmers from practicing managed grazing (see Appendix B for a list of interview questions). We also attended a meeting of the Southeast Wisconsin Grazing Network where we listened and asked questions of the participants. We chose to use qualitative methods because interviewing allowed us to explore in depth our research questions with farmers, Extension agents, university researchers, grazing specialists, and others.

Our study benefited from input from an advisory group made up of farmers, grazing specialists, and university researchers. The group reviewed our interview questions, suggested possible interviewees, and reviewed a draft of this report, providing important feedback. MFAI accepts sole responsibility for the content of this report.

Many of the conventional dairy farmers we interviewed had large modern confinement operations by Wisconsin standards. The average herd size among the conventional dairy farmers we interviewed was 368 cows. While not representative of the average Wisconsin dairy farm, most conventional dairy farmers we interviewed once had small-scale dairy farms and, in recent years, had decided to expand their operations. In particular, this group was able to offer insight into why they did not consider managed grazing as an option as they looked to modernize their operations.

Report Overview

In Chapter 2 of this report, we discuss barriers to transitioning to managed grazing for conventional dairy farmers. In Chapter 3, we examine obstacles for beginning farmers starting managed grazing farms. In Chapter 4, we recommend actions the state and federal government and other interested parties can take to better support managed grazing in Wisconsin and

nationally.

While the principal focus of our research was on managed grazing issues for dairy operations, we also interviewed farmers and agricultural professionals involved with beef production. On page 12 we summarize some of the issue. As part of our work, we also reviewed the resources available in Wisconsin for farmers and others interested in managed grazing. You will find a summary of those resources in Appendix A.



Sidebar: Why practice managed grazing?

Several of the graziers we interviewed once operated conventional dairy farms. We asked them why they chose to transition their farms to managed grazing. In response, a grazier with a 110-cow milking herd said:

Initially, it was just a labor issue. At the time, in 1992, our first child had been born and was barely a year old. We had a considerable cash grain enterprise at the time and a much smaller herd, 40 cows. My wife was doing most of the chores, and she couldn't help me as much anymore. We wanted to cut down on chore time...We loved the results (of managed grazing) so much. The side benefit I discovered was that we could dramatically lower our costs of production. Furthermore, we discovered we enjoyed chores much more when the cows were grazing.

Lifestyle and economics also motivated others we interviewed. One grazier with an 80-cow herd said:

I really don't enjoy machinery – especially fixing it. I really don't enjoy driving around in it. I guess I could involve my kids less in machinery (by switching to managed grazing) – create a safer place for kids. (Managed grazing offered) a chance to add some profits to my bottom line. (Managed grazing requires) less labor to produce the milk.

Concerns for herd health spurred some of the farmers we interviewed to transition their farms to managed grazing. One grazier with a 200-cow herd said he transitioned his milking herd to managed grazing “basically to knock down feed costs and improve cow health – get the cows off cement and improve their foot health.”

Some of the graziers spoke about their interest in ecological sustainability as a reason to practice managed grazing. One farmer described himself as an “advocate for renewable energy and conservation” and viewed managed grazing as an opportunity to save on energy costs. One grazier said, “I was intrigued by the concept (of managed grazing). I always kind of leaned towards (being) a guy who wanted to try something different – especially practicing more sustainable practices.”

Thus, for all of the graziers we interviewed who had transitioned to managed grazing from conventional operations, reducing costs – whether labor, feed, veterinary bills, equipment, or energy – motivated them to make the transition. And for many of them, additional benefits such as lifestyle satisfaction and ecological sustainability furthered their interest in managed grazing.

Chapter 2

Barriers to managed grazing for conventional dairy farmers

Wisconsin dairy farmers face tremendous pressures as large western dairies compete for market share, fuel and feed costs push production expenses upward, and milk prices remain volatile. For some of the state's dairy farmers the answer to this increased pressure is to expand to large-scale modern confinement operations to keep ahead of costs and maintain profitability. However, financial studies show that expansion does not necessarily mean increased profits.⁹ More often costs per hundredweight increase and margins become slimmer. Those same financial studies find that managed grazing offers a low-input alternative that allows farmers to remain profitable. Given the financial successes of managed grazing, why don't more conventional dairy farmers look to managed grazing as an option?¹⁰ We found both structural constraints and farmer perceptions of managed grazing that may limit the ability and willingness of some conventional dairy farmers to transition to managed grazing.

Debt load

Most farms, like most businesses, carry some level of debt. And like most other business people, farmers must generate enough money from the farm's operation to service their debt. For some conventional farmers, concerns over their ability to service their debt by maintaining the farm's cash flow during a transition period may act as a barrier when considering switching to managed grazing¹¹.

⁹ Kriegl and McNair found that large modern confinement dairy farms, defined as having 250 cows or more, compared to managed grazing and traditional confinement farms (with 50 to 75 cows), had the highest cost levels per hundredweight equivalent in all cost categories. They discovered that net farm income from operations (NFIFO) per hundred weight equivalent (CWT EQ) on managed grazing farms "is consistently higher and the three main categories of costs per CWT EQ are consistently lower than on other types of dairy farms, even though managed grazing farms produce less milk per cow on average than other types of dairy farms." Page 5. Kriegl and McNair. February 2005.

¹⁰ A survey of dairy farmers conducted by the Wisconsin Agricultural Statistics Service in 2004 found that "farm profitability, putting in fences or watering systems, and changing their farm management were the most frequently cited reasons not to adopt grazing." Page 16. Taylor and Foltz. January 2006.

¹¹ According to the several of the agricultural professionals we spoke to, most conventional dairy farms that switch to managed grazing experience a drop in milk production. However, the decline in milk production is made up for by decreased costs associated with no longer having to haul manure, raise the



Several of the conventional farmers we interviewed spoke to the issue of debt and investments in buildings and machinery as reasons to not practice managed grazing. When asked why her family had not considered going into managed grazing, one farmer said,

“Cash flow. Getting enough milk out of our cows to cover our debt.” Another conventional farmer said, “If I was starting out, and I had a farm that didn’t have any of the silos on it or anything like that – yes, I probably would (consider managed grazing). But when you’ve already got that stuff, it’s like stepping back.”

Among the agricultural professionals we interviewed, several spoke about farmer perceptions of managed grazing’s impact on debt as limiting farmer interest in the farming system. One agricultural professional said, “If you’re servicing a lot of debt, it’s a big step to make that step (to managed grazing). It’s frightening and sometimes just not possible.” Another agricultural professional said, “High debt is probably a real barrier, and, in many cases, it is a perceived barrier...Very high debt diminishes the farmer’s ability to successfully switch to managed grazing. But average debt level (for dairy farms) should not be a barrier to managed grazing.”

In some cases, debt load can be a structural constraint preventing conventional farmers from switching to managed grazing operations. Dairy farmers facing high debt loads may not be able to successfully switch to managed grazing. One agricultural professional described the issue this way:

The best unit (for transitioning to managed grazing) is one that has not done a lot of major capital renovation at this point. So they have choices on what they would renovate and modernize. The one that is more difficult is one that has gone down the path of putting in a ton of capital renovations, so that now, they have a fairly high cost structure. Now they are locked into a spot where they will find it very difficult. The only way to get out – to make a commitment that grazing will work – is to sell assets. I

majority of the feed crops, or invest in costly machinery or buildings, as was done in the confinement system. Thus, even with a possible decline in milk production, the farmer who makes the transition to managed grazing will continue to have the necessary cash to service the farm’s debt because of the savings related to reduced operational expenses.

think it is very possible to do. It's just more difficult because you've got debt, which does remove some choices.

If a farmer is not able to sell assets to reduce his costs and generate income to service his high debt load, then he may not be able to handle the decline in milk production associated with managed grazing. In a factsheet for farmers on managed grazing, Tom Kriegl, agricultural economist with UW-Madison's Center for Dairy Profitability, writes about the characteristics that make a conventional dairy farmer a good candidate for transitioning to managed grazing. Among the characteristics listed are: "the absence of much unproductive debt." Kriegl adds, "...a switch to grazing is probably not the salvation for a dairy farm burdened with too much unproductive fixed debt."¹² In summary, a farmer, who faces a heavy debt burden, may not have the financial wherewithal to make significant changes to his operation, including a transition to managed grazing.

Thus, most Wisconsin dairy farmers do not have a debt load that will not limit their ability to switch to managed grazing, but a farmer's perceptions of the economics of managed grazing may limit their interest in the system. And for those farmers with a high debt structure, they may not be able to successfully transition to managed grazing, or any other new system, because of severely limited cash flow.

Land

The issue of land as a barrier for conventional farmers in making the transition to managed grazing is, in a few cases, a real constraint, and for many it may be a perceived barrier. To successfully transition a conventional dairy farm to a managed grazing operation requires adequate acreage to develop enough pasture to feed a herd¹³. For most farmers, turning cropland into pasture will provide a sufficient land base for a grazing system, but a few farmers will need to acquire additional land.

The few dairy farmers who will need to acquire additional land to successfully make the switch to managed grazing, may face rising land prices that prohibit them from making the transition on their farms. One agricultural professional in northwest Wisconsin said, "The availability of

¹² Kriegl, T. n/d. *Goods News for Many Wisconsin Dairy Farms!* Center for Dairy Profitability. UW-Madison.

¹³ How much land is needed for a managed grazing dairy farm will vary greatly depending on the size of the herd and how much of the herd's feed will come from pasture versus stored feed.

contiguous land may limit the size of grazing herds. The cost of land is very high and, around here, it is just prohibitive.” Others argued that leasing land remains a viable option for farmers interested in starting managed grazing operations. When asked if there is adequate land for grazing, one agricultural professional said, “Not necessarily adequate land to buy, but adequate land to control. In other words, there are all kinds of farms sitting idle that farmers can rent. In a particular area there may not be land to buy – may have to move. I think that it varies tremendously (from region to region).... The actual control of land may be accessible through leasing.”

Farmer perceptions of the land based needed for managed grazing may limit farmer interest in managed grazing. Many of the conventional farmers we interviewed have expanded their milking herds in recent years. When asked about managed grazing as a system for their farms, several of them said the land base needed to rotationally graze their size of herd was too great.

One farmer with 170 milking cows said managed grazing would not be conducive for their herd size. Other farmers echoed her concerns. A farmer with a 500-cow herd noted that he did not have the land base to graze, and renting more land was too costly in eastern Wisconsin where he said rental prices are \$300/acre for land intended for corn production. Another farmer in



northern Wisconsin, with close to 600 milking cows, said, “The challenge that I see is that I’d have to rent quite a bit of land to support the dairy herd. To rent land at \$50 to \$60 an acre to raise grass for pasture just doesn’t seem like it would work.”

Thus, most conventional farmers will have adequate land to transition to managed grazing, but may assume that managed grazing operations require more land than is necessary. In some regions of the state, high land prices may act as a real constraint for those few farmers who will need to purchase, or rent additional land to successfully transition their farms to managed

grazing.

Measures of success

A common measure for success of a dairy farm is the herd's average milk production. Among many farmers and dairy specialists, high herd average is the mark of a well-managed and efficient operation. However, the common perception that high herd averages equals financial success is not necessarily accurate, as Kriegl and McNair point out in their study, comparing different types of dairy operations¹⁴.

We found that negative perceptions among conventional farmers of managed grazing's lower herd averages, as compared to conventional operations, may limit farmer interest in the system. For example, a farmer with 30 milking cows said that his main reason for not considering managed grazing was limited production. He said, "You limit the cows' ability to produce. I don't know of any grazing herds that have really, really, really high herd averages." Another farmer with a 520-cow herd had attended a grazing conference before he expanded to his current herd size. He ultimately decided not to transition to managed grazing because it is "fun for me to increase production... That's not the focus of grazing." In contrast, farmers of grazing operations often measure their success not by their herd averages, but by their profits. Thus, making the transition to thinking about success in terms of profitability, instead of herd averages, may be a barrier for some conventional dairy farmers in making the switch to managed grazing.

Practicality & Lifestyle

Other reasons given by the conventional dairy farmers we interviewed for not considering managed grazing related to perceptions of the practicality of grazing, and its fit with their lifestyle. Several conventional dairy farmers we interviewed stated that managed grazing in Wisconsin was not practical because of the state's climate and, consequently, its limited grazing season. But experience shows that Wisconsin farmers who practice managed grazing are able to make the system work profitably and practically for them, even in the northern corners of the state.

¹⁴ Kriegl and McNair. February 2005.

Others were concerned about lifestyle issues. One farmer, whose father had done limited grazing, said that managed grazing did not fit the lifestyle that his family wanted. He said when he and his wife took over the farm from his father, they wanted more time off for vacation than their parents had. Their way of achieving that was to have a farm of 500 milking cows that allowed them to hire employees and have time off for vacation. Another farmer spoke negatively of having to “chase cows” as a child. She did not want to do that again in a managed grazing system. She went on to say that “grazing was never really an option” because she and her husband like the conventional system of raising crops and intensive cow management.

Sidebar: Future of farming

Few of the conventional dairy farmers we interviewed thought that someone getting into farming today could farm as they do. Most viewed the financial investment to start a conventional operation as too high for most beginning farmers without significant family investment or other financial support. Many thought managed grazing might be a more affordable way for a beginning farmer to get started. One farmer said, “I think it would be much harder ... to start out farming like we do, than rotational grazing.”

Among the graziers we spoke to, there was a more mixed response to whether someone getting into farming today could farm as they do. Many answered affirmatively. One grazier said, “I think so. I don’t know a reason why they could not (farm like I do). Again, I think they would have to spend some time with someone else learning how to do it (managed grazing)...I don’t find it difficult to convince a banker that this is the way to farm. Obviously, I have a history of this.” Other graziers were more cautious. One responded by saying that “Yes, if they have a farm and the land base to go with it.” Another said, “Yes, with off-farm income. The problem is the cost of land.”

Chapter 3

Barriers to managed grazing for beginning dairy farmers

Research has found that a higher percentage of Wisconsin beginning dairy farmers practice managed grazing on their farms compared with the overall dairy farm population¹⁵. However, our interviewing revealed considerable obstacles for beginning farmers interested in managed grazing. For many beginning farmers, access to land, capital, and experience can limit their ability to successfully establish a farm; however, beginning graziers may experience additional obstacles when trying to start a managed grazing farm¹⁶. In this section we will examine each of these issues.

Land

Finding land to establish a managed grazing farm can be challenging for a beginning dairy farmer, according to several of the agricultural professionals and farmers we interviewed. For those that come from a farm background, it can be difficult for the young, beginning farmer to convince the older generation to transition the family farm to managed grazing.

As beginning farmers look to find land of their own, they often do not have the capital to buy land. Additionally, in some parts of the state, land prices can be prohibitively high for the beginning dairy farmer. Many of the agricultural professionals we spoke to argued that leasing land was a better option for beginning farmers. It requires less capital and does not burden the beginning farmer with high debt. However, finding land to lease for managed grazing can present a significant challenge in some parts of the state.

¹⁵ “Among a sample of dairy farm entrants surveyed in 1996 (Buttel et al., 1999), nearly 30 percent were using MIRG (management intensive rotational grazing) practices. When compared with overall MIRG usage rates at the time of 14.6% in Wisconsin, beginning dairy farmers were nearly twice as likely to employ MIRG systems.” Page 3. Ostrom, M and Jackson-Smith, D. August 2000. *The Use and Performance of Management Intensive Rotational Grazing Among Wisconsin Dairy Farmers in the 1990s*. PATS Research Report No. 8.

¹⁶ For more on challenges facing beginning dairy farmers go to: Barham, B., Jackson-Smith, J., Stevenson, S., Taylor, J. October 2001. *Nurturing the Next Generation of Wisconsin’s Dairy Farmers*. University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Many retiring dairy farmers do not want to rent their land to graziers, which can limit the available land for beginning graziers. Several of the agricultural professionals we interviewed spoke about an increasing number of retiring dairy farmers who want to stay on their land and maintain some part in the operation. Often they want to raise feed crops for the dairy operation. As a consequence, these semi-retiring farmers do not want to rent their land to a grazier who will convert their cropland to pasture. Even among those retiring farmers who do not want to be a part of the operation, there can be resistance to renting to graziers¹⁷. One agricultural professional said:

There is significant resistance (to renting to beginning graziers). I don't think they (landowners) are worried about their monthly rent check. (They think:) 'It's that it's flat ground and it should be in corn. If you want to pasture your cows, you go to the wasteland where nothing else grows, but grass.'

Many of the interviewees we spoke with echoed this concern. One agricultural professional said, “Convincing a conventional farmer that it makes sense not to grow corn and beans and alfalfa, but to build fence and convert to pasture - that's tough.” Thus, many retiring dairy farmers may be unfamiliar with managed grazing, and its benefits, and feel cautious, or unwilling to “risk” the farm by renting to a beginning grazier. For others, perceptions of grazing that derive from poorly managed pastures of the past may consign managed grazing to a less than desirable status.

Capital

Building equity to start a farm can be difficult for any beginning farmer, but for beginning graziers there can be additional challenges. Several of the agricultural professionals we interviewed said that few farms have the infrastructure needed for managed grazing. As a result, the beginning grazier will often have to purchase new fences, develop lanes, and possibly upgrade older facilities to establish their farm. To make their investment worthwhile, the beginning grazier must have a secure lease for at least several years. And as we described above, it can be difficult for beginning graziers to secure a lease.

¹⁷ A study conducted in Iowa found that farmers who rented their land and did not have stable land contracts may face difficulties in implementing sustainable agricultural practices. Carolan, M.S., Mayerfield, D., Bell, M.M., and Exner, R., J/A 2004. Rented Land: Barriers to Sustainable Agriculture. *Journal of Soil and Water Conservation*. 59:4: 70A – 75A.

Securing loans can be an additional challenge for beginning graziers. According to some we interviewed, convincing a banker to make a loan to a beginning grazier for the capital needed to start a grazing operation can be difficult. Despite managed grazing's increased presence on Wisconsin's landscape, some lenders are still not comfortable making loans to graziers. It can often take persistence by the beginning grazier to secure the initial capital loan for their farm.

Experience

Wisconsin has a few opportunities where beginning graziers can receive classroom instruction on managing a grazing system (see Appendix A). However, several of people we interviewed raised concerns that there are not enough opportunities for beginning graziers to receive classroom instruction and on-farm experience before they start out on their own. One grazier said:

Each year we try to have an intern here... One of the things that always comes to the forefront when we have one of these young people is simply this – there are classes you can take on grazing that...explain technical skills of grazing. The thing that is always the void is their ability to actually do it... Grazing is not a skill, but an art...Their biggest challenge is finding a place where they can get OJT- on the job training.

One agricultural professional we interviewed did not think that beginning farmers should start out practicing managed grazing. Though he teaches a grazing course and is supportive of managed grazing, he felt strongly that young, beginning farmers often lack the skills necessary to successfully practice managed grazing.

Even though I am a believer in management intensive grazing, I've run the numbers. I know what it can do for a farmer, and the theory would say this is a great thing to do. The reality is, it is awfully tough for a young farmer to get started that way with the exception of someone who comes out of Dick Cates' class (Wisconsin School for Beginning Dairy Farmers), where they had the chance to get out on a farm and learn management intensive grazing...start learning the art of it, before they go off on their own.

The vast majority of agricultural professionals we interviewed thought managed grazing was a good system for beginning farmers to get started in. But many of them also stressed that on-farm experience was a necessary component for beginning farmers to successfully start their own managed grazing farm. And many beginning farmers, particularly those that come from a

non-farm background, may not be aware of the opportunities in Wisconsin where they can gain on-farm experience.



Sidebar: Beef managed grazing

According to the USDA, there were 12,700 beef operations in Wisconsin in 2005*. How many of them practice managed grazing is not known. And unlike dairy grazing, the economics of beef managed grazing have not been studied.

We interviewed two beef producers who practice managed grazing, including one who direct markets his beef and another who runs a stocker operation. We also interviewed a conventional feedlot operator who is considering transitioning to managed grazing as well as grazing specialists who work with beef graziers.

Many of beef operators in Wisconsin are part-time farmers. According to several of our interviewees, many of these part-time operators treat beef production as a hobby. As a consequence, they may be less inclined to learn a new management system like managed grazing.

Despite this, those we interviewed overwhelmingly thought the transition to managed grazing was easier in beef than in dairy. According to one agricultural professional:

It's less of a challenge getting into beef rotational grazing (than dairy grazing), especially if you're familiar with the beef market, and you've run beef before. Maybe you have a feedlot. A lot of people would take some row cropland that was rougher, or they have some pasture and do some rotational (grazing already). It's not that big of a change for them.

The feedlot operator we interviewed was interested in managed grazing because he was “tired of hauling manure”, and he wanted to save on labor. He also viewed managed grazing as an opportunity for his children to be involved with the farm.

To better understand the opportunities and constraints of beef managed grazing, more research is needed. Currently, CIAS is researching the status of beef production in the state, including managed grazing, which will provide necessary information on the industry. Additionally, more information is needed on the economics of beef managed grazing to better understand its potential for current and beginning farmers.

(* A beef operation is defined by the USDA as any place having one or more head of beef cows on hand at any time during the year. January 2006. Agricultural Statistics Board. *Farms, Land in Farms and Livestock Operations 2005 Summary*. NASS, USDA)

Chapter 4

Recommendations

Wisconsin is a leader in managed grazing, but significant gaps in pasture-based farming systems education, research, technical assistance, and funding still persist in the state. At the federal level, unintentional barriers exist that can prevent some managed grazing farmers from fully participating in federal agricultural programs. In this section, based on the feedback we received in our interviews, we recommend steps state agencies, the University of Wisconsin, technical colleges, and others can take to better support managed grazing, and ultimately, the state's livestock producers. More briefly, we summarize how federal agricultural programs can better serve managed grazing operations.

Create financial transitions teams

To dispel the myths about the economics of transitioning to managed grazing from conventional systems, we recommend that UW-Extension develop financial transition teams, made up of Extension agents and partner organizations (e.g. NRCS, Land Conservation Departments, Resource Conservation & Development Councils, etc.) to conduct outreach to the dairy and livestock farming communities on the economics related to transitioning to managed grazing. We recommend that teams be developed regionally to offer managed grazing workshops and one-on-one financial planning for farmers. We also recommend that the teams reach out to the banking community and farm organizations on the economics of managed grazing.

Increase participatory research in managed grazing

For managed grazing to continue to be a successful alternative for Wisconsin farmers, university research is needed. In 2004, CIAS received USDA funding for directed managed grazing research. The Grazing Research Initiative required that all research projects include “the integration of farmer participation in the work, through advisory or actual on-farm efforts.”¹⁸

¹⁸ Cates, Dick. 2006. *The CIAS/CREES Grazing Research Initiative: strengthening Wisconsin's pasture-based farming industry through directed research*. Page 1. Flier distributed at 2006 Grassworks grazing conference.

The Initiative is an excellent example of how farmer interests can be integrated into university research. We recommend that the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences (CALs) of UW-Madison increase its participatory research on managed grazing to include additional departments in the College. A survey of graziers on needed areas of research, conducted by UW-Extension in 2003, offers a list of possible research topics to explore¹⁹. The surveyed research areas receiving high ranks by graziers include:

- Evaluate common pasture varieties under actual grazing situations by region
- Identify top performing grazing farms to find their secrets of success
- Develop nutrient crediting under managed grazing systems
- Study the impact of supplemental feeding on soil nutrient levels over time
- Study the impact of stocking rate on soil nutrient levels over time
- Evaluate soil responses to different grazing and fallowing schemes
- Study the relationships between grazing, animal health and reproduction

Develop managed grazing curriculum for the University of Wisconsin, technical colleges and high schools

The Wisconsin School for Beginning Dairy Farmers (WSBDF), based at U-Madison's CIAS, offers an excellent program of short courses for beginning farmers interested in learning managed grazing. However, for those students who choose to get a four-year degree from UW-Madison's CALS, there are few opportunities to learn about managed grazing systems²⁰.

Working with WSBDF, we recommend that CALS develop a managed grazing curriculum for those degree programs that are designed to train the next generation of farmers, Extension agents, and others working on livestock agricultural issues. Similarly, we recommend that the Wisconsin Technical College System expand their offerings in managed grazing instruction by

¹⁹ In 2003, at the Wisconsin Grazing Conference Grassworks Annual Meeting, a survey of Grassworks members on their research priorities was conducted. For more information on the survey results, contact Tom Cadwallader, UW-Extension Agricultural Agent with Marathon and Lincoln Counties.

²⁰ Every other year, the Agronomy Department at UW-Madison offers a Grassland Ecology course, which offers a survey of pasture-based systems ecology. Additional classes on managed grazing's economics and production issues should be developed to create a managed grazing curriculum for the college.

developing core classes in pasture-based systems. Finally, we recommend that the Department of Public Instruction, working with Future Farmers of America (FFA), develop programs that offer high school students opportunities to learn about managed grazing.

Expand on-farm training and equity-building opportunities for beginning graziers

To provide needed on-farm training in managed grazing for beginning farmers, Wisconsin must develop a better network of on-farm internships. We recommend that the WSBDF and Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP)'s grazing specialist work together with the technical colleges and grazing networks to identify new farmer mentors for managed grazing internships. We also recommend that WSBDF or DATCP create a fund to pay farmer mentors a stipend for participating in the program.

Additionally, Wisconsin should expand the opportunities for beginning graziers to build equity for their future operations. In Crawford County, UW-Extension and the Great Rivers Grazing Network developed an incubator farm project where beginning farmers are matched with experienced graziers to gain on-farm experience and build equity through share-milking arrangements. There is also an incubator farm project in Marathon County. We recommend that UW-Extension work with grazing networks, grazing specialists, and the technical colleges to establish managed grazing incubator farm projects in other regions of the state that allow beginning farmers to invest in a farm and build equity while gaining experience.

Increase FarmLink program's capacity to assist retiring and beginning farmers

To better address land access problems for beginning farmers, DATCP's FarmLink program needs increased resources to adequately serve its mission. As part of DATCP's Farm Center, the FarmLink program connects retiring and beginning farmers to assist in the transition of farms to the next generation. Currently, there is only one-part time staff person who manages the program. As a result, the program does not have the resources to follow-up with potential matches of retiring and beginning farmers, nor does the program have the resources to evaluate the success of its work.

We recommend that a full-time staff position be created to direct FarmLink²¹. The director should work one-on-one with retiring and beginning farmers. Additionally, we recommend that the program's assistance to farmers be bolstered by recruiting and training volunteers, made up of retired farmers, Extension agents, bankers and others, who can work in their communities as farm transition experts. The volunteers can work with the director of FarmLink to identify retiring farmers²², match them with beginning farmers, and work with the farmers to assist them during the transition. Finally, to assess the success of the program, we recommend that the director conduct an annual evaluation of the program.

Secure funding for GLCI by increasing state funding

Many of those we interviewed said that technical assistance was critical for the success of many farmers starting managed grazing farms. Funded by the USDA, the Wisconsin Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI) provides the majority of funding for the managed grazing technical assistance and educational resources in the state. However, GLCI funding has often been put into question because of uncertainties of the federal appropriations process. Therefore, we recommend that state government offset possible cuts to GLCI funding by establishing a fund for managed grazing technical assistance and education.

Federal Policy Recommendations

Although this report focuses principally on state policy remedies to the constraints identified through our interviews, there are many federal policy changes that could better support-managed grazing. These range from risk management policies that support diversified farming operations to access to farm credit for beginning farmers. Also graziers would benefit from increased funding for research and extension on managed grazing practices, and identifying value-added products, and grass-based product markets. Moreover, many conservation programs' benefits are tied to certain practices. The U.S. Department of Agriculture should adjust Conservation Security Program (CSP) requirements to assure that managed grazing is an eligible and encouraged practice. Additionally, we recommend that USDA encourage NRCS staff to work

²¹ We recommend that the director have a background in farm financials for both start-up, and retiring farms.

²² We recommend that farmers who practice managed grazing and have been successful financially be targeted for training as farm transition experts.

with landowners of Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) land to incorporate managed grazing in their CRP conservation plans when such practices meet the objectives for wildlife species protection, soil and water conservation and other purposes.



Appendix A: Managed grazing resources

Publications

The following organizations offer publications on managed grazing issues:

Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems

University of Wisconsin-Madison
College of Agricultural and Life Sciences
1535 Observatory Drive
Madison, WI 53706
608-262-5200
www.cias.wisc.edu

University of Wisconsin, Extension Publications

1-877-WIS-PUBS
<http://cecommerce.uwex.edu/>

University of Wisconsin, Extension Forage Team Grazing Workgroup

www.uwrf.edu/grazing/

ATTRA - National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service

1- 800-346-9140 (English)
1- 800-411-3222 (Español)
www.attra.org/livestock.html

Michael Fields Agricultural Institute

W2493 County Rd ES
PO Box 990
East Troy, WI 53120
262-642-3303
www.michaelfieldsagainst.org

Grazing Schools

Wisconsin School for Beginning Dairy Farmers

The Wisconsin School for Beginning Dairy Farmers offers the Grass-Based Dairying Specialty course through the Farm and Industry Short Course program. Additionally, WSBDF offers internships,

certificates, and the Grass-Based Dairy Seminar. The seminar begins in mid-November and runs through March, and consists of three terms. All seminar sessions are available on CD-ROM.

UW-Madison Farm and Industry Short Course

116 Agriculture Hall
1450 Linden Drive
Madison, WI 53706
608-265-6437
www.cias.wisc.edu/dairysch.html

Wisconsin School for Transitioning Farmers

The Wisconsin School for Transitioning Farmers is tailored for any confinement farmer who is interested in transitioning to managed grazing. In four classroom sessions, participants learn managed grazing systems, including paddock layout and design, pasture development, nutrition and reproduction, soil ecology and fencing. The classroom sessions are held in winter with a follow-up of two pasture walks in the spring. The program is generally held in west central Wisconsin, but could be held anywhere in the state where there is sufficient interest.

Mary C. Anderson
River Country RCD
19225 Dewey Street
P.O. Box 645
Whitehall, WI 54773
715-538-4396

Wisconsin Grazing Schools

The Wisconsin Grazing Schools program is designed to teach producers, educators and agency staff the basics of managed grazing with a hands-on approach. These two-day, intensive workshops will provide opportunities for in-depth discussions, field

exercises, and reference materials that cover both livestock and agronomic topics related to grazing.

Dennis Cosgrove
UW-River Falls
410 S. 3rd Street
River Falls, WI 54022
715-425-3345

University of Wisconsin, Extension: Conservation Planning Training

This two-day class gives attendees the opportunity to learn about grazing plans, develop a draft grazing plan for a local farm, and receive feedback from the local farmer.

This summer class focuses on a different farm in the state each year.

Kevin Erb
UW Extension Environmental Resources
Center
1150 S Bellevue St, Green Bay WI 54302
920-391-4652
kevin.erb@ces.uwex.edu

Technical Colleges

Madison Area Technical College – Reedsburg

MATC – Reedsburg holds a six-week course in managed grazing in the spring. The course is taught by grazing specialists from across the state and veteran graziers. The course is complimented by on-farm workshops on veteran grazier and student farms in the spring and summer. MATC – Reedsburg also provides several related classes to the grazing course.

Doug Marshall
300 Alexander Ave.
Reedsburg, Wisconsin 53959
608-524-7727
<http://matcmadison.edu/reedsburg/>

Mid-State Technical College

As part of the Farm Business and Production Management Program, students can work in small groups and one-on-one with the instructor on projects related to managed grazing, including financial studies of grazing operations. Mid-State also organizes pasture walks for students.

Mike Sabel
500 32nd St N
Wisconsin Rapids, WI 54494
715-422-5387
<http://www.mstc.edu/>

Blackhawk Technical College

As part of the Farm Business and Production Management Program, Blackhawk offers instruction on managed grazing as part of its classes, including on-farm education.

Brad Harrison
6004 Prairie Road
P.O. Box 5009
Janesville, WI 53547
608-743-4475
<http://www.blackhawk.edu/>

Lakeshore Technical College

Lakeshore hosts managed grazing tours and seminars around the region. As part of the Farm Business and Production Management Program, interested students can tailor their learning experience to include studying managed grazing.

Greg Booher
1290 North Avenue
Cleveland, WI 53015
920-960-0551
<http://www.gotoltc.com/>

Northeast Wisconsin Technical College

Northeast Wisconsin Technical College is offering a new class on organic livestock, which will include a significant managed grazing component. The class instructors are graziers.

Don Jaworski
2740 W. Mason Street
P.O. Box 19042
Green Bay, WI 54307
920-498-5659
<http://www.nwtc.edu/>

Southwest Wisconsin Technical College

Southwest Wisconsin Technical College has several offerings that may be of interest to beginning graziers. As part of the Farm Business and Production Management Program, the Dairy Herd Management Program, and the Agribusiness Program, Southwest Tech offers managed grazing components in several classes. Southwest Tech also offers many workshops that may be relevant for graziers, including a Forage Expo in January and a Dairy Summit in December.

Andrew Calhoun
1800 Bronson Blvd
Fennimore, WI 53809
608-822-3262 x2303
<http://www.swtc.edu/>

Wisconsin Indianhead Technical College – Rice Lake

Wisconsin Indianhead Technical College at Rice Lake provides a nine-month Dairy Herd Management course that includes a unit on managed grazing. The same course is also available as a semester-long Internet course. The Farm Business and Production Management Program offers interested students opportunities to tailor their learning experience to include studying managed grazing.

Craig Hamernik
Rice Lake Campus

1900 College Drive
Rice Lake, WI 54868
715-837-1669
<http://www.witechcolleges.com/witc.htm>

Western Technical College

A managed grazing component is offered through the classes in the Farm Business and Production Management Program. Also, instructors provide individual on-farm instruction, which could include grazing activities.

Peter Brandt
304 Sixth Street North
La Crosse, WI 54602
608-462-5922
<http://www.wwtc.edu/>

Grazing Specialists

Grazing specialists provide planning assistance to graziers and those interested in starting a managed grazing operation. Grazing specialists may also coordinate pasture walks and workshops on managed grazing. Grazing specialists are often certified through the Grazing Land Planning Certification. The following is a list of agencies with grazing specialists on their staff and individual specialists.

University Extension Agents

Some county Extension offices have staff that can work with farmers on developing a managed grazing plan. Please contact your county Extension office for more information.

432 N. Lake Street
Madison, WI 53706
608-262-3980
www.uwex.edu/ces/ag/directories/

Land Conservation Departments

www.wlwca.org/Pages/LCDWeb.html

Sauk County Land Conservation
Department
505 Broadway, Room 232
Baraboo, WI 53913-2183
1-608-355-3245
Counties covered: Sauk

Vernon County Land Conservation
Department
Kelly Jacobs
220 Airport Road
Viroqua, WI 54665
1-608-637-5477
Counties covered: Vernon

Marathon County Conservation Planning
and Zoning Department
Paul Daigle
210 River Drive
Wausau, WI 54403
1-715-261-6006
Counties covered: Lincoln, Marathon

Columbia County Land and Water
Conservation Department
Tim O'Leary
Todd Reitmann
120 West Conant Street
P.O. Box 485
Portage, WI 53901
1-608-742-9670
Counties covered: Columbia

Resource Conservation & Development Councils

8030 Excelsior Drive
Madison, WI 53717
608-662-4422 ext. 232
www.wi.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/rcd.html

River Country RC&D
Heather Flashinski
Brian Brezinski
1304 North Hillcrest Parkway, Suite B
Altoona, WI 54720
1-715-834-9672
Counties covered: Chippewa, Dunn, Eau
Claire

Mary C. Anderson
19225 Dewey Street
P.O. Box 645
Whitehall, WI 54773
1-715-538-4396
Counties covered: Buffalo, Jackson,
LaCrosse, Monroe, Trempealeau

Southwest Badger RC&D
Eugene Schriefer
150 W. Alona Lane
Lancaster, WI 53813
1-608-723-6377
Counties covered: Crawford, Grant, Green,
Iowa, Lafayette

Pri Ru Ta RC&D
Adam Abel
925 Donald Street
Medford, WI 54451
1-715-748-2008
Counties covered: Clark, Price, Rusk,
Sawyer, Taylor

Golden Sands RC&D
Teal Fyksen
1462 Strongs Avenue
Stevens Point, WI 54481
1-715-343-6216
Counties covered: Adams, Juneau,
Marathon, Marquette, Portage, Waupaca,
Waushara, Wood

Town & Country RC&D
Haly Schulz
333.E Washington Street Suite.3200
P.O. Box 2003
West Bend, WI 53095
Email: haly.schultz@rcdnet.net
Phone: 262-335-4808
Counties Covered: Columbia, Dane, Dodge,
Green, Jefferson, Kenosha, Milwaukee,
Ozaukee, Racine, Rock, Walworth,
Washington, Waukasha

Natural Resources Conservation Service

8030 Excelsior Drive
Madison, WI 53717-2906

608-662-4422
<http://www.wi.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/grazing.html>

Northwest
Richard Zirk
Northwest Area Office
1304 N. Hillcrest Pkwy, Ste A
Altoona, WI 54720-2597
Phone: 715-832-6547 ext 112
Email: rick.zirk@wi.usda.gov

Northeast
Larry Brummund
3369 West Brewster St.
Appleton, WI 54914-1602
Phone: 920-733-1575 ext 127
Email: larry.brummund@wi.usda.gov

Southwest
Jean Stramel
1850 Bohman Drive
Richland Center, WI 53581-2907
Phone: 608-647-8874 ext 100
Email: jean.stramel@wi.usda.gov

Southeast
Brian Pillsbury
505 Broadway, Room 232
Baraboo, WI 53913-2183
1-608-355-3245

Independent Technical Service Providers or Consultants

Altfred Krusenbaum
W3194 County Road D
Elkhorn, WI 53121
1-262-642-7312
Counties covered: Jefferson, Kenosha, Racine, Rock, Walworth, Waukesha

Carl Fredericks
10246 Gilbertson Road
Mount Horeb, WI 53572
1-608-437-4395
Counties covered: Dane, Green

Department of Agriculture, Trade

and Consumer Protection

Laura Paine
Grazing & Organic Agriculture Specialist
WI DATCP Division of Agricultural Development
PO Box 8911
Madison, WI 53708
608-224-5120

Grazing Networks

Farmer-based grazing networks provide information about managed grazing primarily through the use of pasture walks, which are farm tours specifically geared towards managed grazing issues. Some networks may also bring in expert speakers to discuss a variety of topics throughout the year. There are a number of grazing networks throughout Wisconsin, and GrassWorks serves as the clearinghouse for the networks.

GrassWorks

GrassWorks is a membership association that links farmers through local networks and provides leadership, education, and research support to promote grass-based farming to increase the number of successful graziers in Wisconsin. GrassWorks hosts an annual conference where graziers and interested farmers have a chance to meet with one another, hear from experts, and attend workshops.

Paul Nehring, Executive Director
210 River Drive
Wausau, WI 54403
715-261-6009
www.grassworks.org

Central Wisconsin Graziers

Keith VanderVelde
480 Underwood Ave.
Montello, WI 53949
608-297-9153

Central Wisconsin River Graziers

(Lincoln, Langlade and Marathon Counties)
Paul Daigle
Marathon County LCD
210 River Drive
Wausau, WI 54403-5447
715-261-6000

Chippewa Valley Graziers

Mary Anderson
18660 Dewey Street
Whitehall, WI 54655
715-538-4396

Columbia County Graziers

Robert and Karen Breneman
N5953 County Road G
Rio, WI 53960
920-348-5504

Columbia County Land and Water Conservation Department

Todd Rietmann
PO Box 485
120 West Conant Street
Portage, 53901-0485
608/742-9670
todd.rietmann@co.columbia.wi.us

Coulee Graziers

(La Crosse, Jackson, Trempealeau and Buffalo Counties)
Mary Anderson
18660 Dewey Street
Whitehall, WI 54655
715-538-4396

Dane-Green Graziers

(Dane and Green Counties)
Bert Paris
W3443 County Road W
Belleville, WI 53508
608-424-6396

Dodge County Land Conservation Department

John Bohonek
Administration Bldg., 127 E. Oak St.,

Juneau, 53039-1329
920-386-3660
jbohonek@co.dodge.wi.us

Fond-O-Grass Graziers

(Fond du Lac, Sheboygan and Manitowoc Counties)
Mike Rankin
UW Extension, UW Center
400 Campus Drive
Fond du Lac, WI 54935
920-929-3171

Fox River Graziers

Thomas and Susan Wrchota
5200 O'Reilly Road
Omro, WI 54963

Grant County Graziers

Dave Wachter
UW Extension
PO Box 31
Lancaster, WI 53813
608-723-2125

Great River Graziers

(Crawford County)
Doug Spany
Route 1
Wauzeka, WI 53826
608-875-5200

Vance Haugen, UW Extension
111 West Dunn Street
Prairie du Chien, WI 53821-1995
608-326-0223

Iowa & Lafayette County Graziers Network

Rhonda Gildersleeve
Courthouse 222 N. Iowa Street
Dodgeville, WI 53533
608-935-0391

Living Off the Land Grazing Network

(Sauk County)
Paulette Bradley

W10581 Bell Road
Camp Douglas, WI 54618
608-427-2201

North Central Graziers Network

(Taylor, Clark, and Chippewa Counties)
Adam Abel
Pri-Ru-Ta RC&D
715-748-2008

Northwest WI Graziers Network

Patrick Richter
Barron County LCD
Courthouse Agriculture Building
Barron, WI 54812
715-537-6315

Ocooch Graziers

(Vernon and Richland Counties)
Jean Stramel
608-647-8874
jean.stramel@wi.usda.gov

Walworth County Graziers

Peg Reedy
UW Extension
W3929 County Rd NN
Elkhorn, WI 53121
262-41-3175

Waupaca/Portage Graziers

Teal Fyksen
1062 Strongs Ave
Stevens Point, WI
715-343-6216

Grant or Cost-Sharing Programs

Land Conservation Departments

LCDs vary from county to county in conservation priorities. Contact your county LCD to find out if managed grazing is eligible for a cost-share program.
www.wlwca.org/Pages/LCDWeb.html

USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service: Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

EQIP in Wisconsin pays up to 50 and 75 percent of the costs of eligible conservation practices. Incentive payments may be made to encourage a farmer to adopt land management practices, such as nutrient management, manure management, integrated pest management, or wildlife habitat management. EQIP offers contracts for practice implementation from 1-10 years. These contracts provide incentive payments and cost share payments for implementing conservation practices.
8030 Excelsior Drive
Madison, WI 53717-2906
608-662-4422
wi.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/eqip.html

Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI)

The GLCI grant program provides funding for technical assistance, education and research on managed grazing.
c/o Laura Paine
Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection
Division of Agricultural Development
PO Box 8911
Madison, WI 53708
608-224-5120
<http://datcp.state.wi.us/arm/agriculture/land-water/grazergrant/index.jsp>

Strengthening Wisconsin's Pasture-based Industry Through Directed Research

The Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems (CIAS), UW-Madison, coordinates with the Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative in providing research grants for farmer projects as well as academic projects. USDA Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service Special Grants Program funds the grant program coordinated by CIAS. Information on this project is available through the CIAS or

through the Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative above.

Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems
University of Wisconsin-Madison
College of Agricultural and Life Sciences
1535 Observatory Drive
Madison, WI 53706
608-262-5200
www.cias.wisc.edu

Grow Wisconsin Dairy Team

Dairy Farm Organic: Grazing or Farm Entry Transition

Grants of up to \$7,500 may be awarded to help dairy farmers get started in business or for existing dairy farmers to transition to or enhance organic or intensively managed grazing operations. Cow, goat or sheep operations may apply. Projects must incorporate financial analysis and planning. Other grants for dairy producers and processors are available through the Grow Wisconsin Dairy Team.

Roger James
Grow Wisconsin Dairy Team
Wisconsin Department of Agriculture,
Trade & Consumer Protection
2811 Agriculture Drive
Madison, WI 53718
800-942-2474

Farm Service Agency

Wisconsin's Farm Service Agency has a goal to increase the number of new farmers through the beginning farmer loan program. A beginning farmer is a farmer who has farmed less than 10 years on his or her own. Contact your local FSA office for more information.

<http://www.fsa.usda.gov/pas/publications/facts/begloan05.pdf>

Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE), USDA

SARE is a competitive grants program providing grants to researchers, agricultural educators, farmers and ranchers, and students in the United States. The producer grants typically run between \$1,000 and \$15,000 to conduct research, marketing and demonstration projects. For more on the SARE grant program go to:
<http://www.sare.org/grants/index.htm>

Value Added Producer Grant (VAPG) Program, USDA

Administered by the Rural Business Cooperative Service of USDA, VAPG is a competitive grant program to support the development of value-added agricultural products and commodity-based renewable energy products. Planning and working capital grants are available to producers. For more on VAPG go to:
<http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/wi/programs/rbs/valueadd.htm>
<http://aic.uwex.edu/programs/VAPG.cfm>

Conservation Security Program (CSP), USDA

Begun in 2004, the CSP program rewards farmers in selected watersheds for their land stewardship practices that improve natural resource conservation. CSP is the country's first "green payment" program, supporting farmers in their use of conservation practices on working lands. For more on CSP go to:
<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Programs/csp/>
<http://www.wi.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp.html>

Appendix B: Interview questions

Interview question for graziers:

1. Can you tell me a little bit about your farm:
 - What size herd do you have?
 - Do you own or rent your land? How many acres do you have?
 - Do you come from a farm background?
 - Do you have an off-farm job?
2. Have you always practiced rotational grazing?
 - If yes, how long have you been farming?
 - Why did you choose to do rotational grazing instead of a conventional dairy operation?
3. If no, when did you make the transition to rotational grazing?
 - Why did you decide to get into rotational grazing?
 - What helped you make the transition to rotational grazing?
 - What was the easiest part of the transition?
 - What was the hardest part?
4. Are you a member of a grazing network?
5. How important is the network for you?
6. Do you attend regular meetings?
7. If you were starting now and wanted to get into rotational grazing what would be the biggest challenges to getting started?
8. Why don't more farmers get into rotational grazing?
9. What are the biggest hurdles for farmers who want to make the transition to rotational grazing?
10. What are your biggest costs?
11. Do you think someone else getting into farming today could farm like you do? Why or why not?
12. What do you think are the most important skills and gifts needed to make a successful farm operation?
13. Do you have friendships with farmers where sharing information and ideas on farming?
14. How would you define what it means to be a successful farmer?

15. What are your goals for your farm?
16. What can agencies do to support farmers transitioning to grazing systems?
17. Is there anything else you wanted to say? Anything I didn't cover?

Questions for conventional farmers:

1. Can you tell me a little bit about your farm:
 - What size herd do you have?
 - Do you own or rent your land?
 - How many acres do you have?
 - Do you own machinery?
 - Do you raise crops?
 - Do you come from a farm background?
 - Do you have an off-farm job?
2. The parts of your day as a farmer you like the best?
3. What are the parts of your farm operation that you worry the most about?
4. Where do you get your information on what's happening with your industry?
5. What are your biggest costs?
6. Have you ever attended a rotational grazing workshop or pasture walk?
7. Do you know farmers who do rotational grazing?
8. Have you ever considered transitioning to rotational grazing?
 - Why or why not?
9. Are you aware of information regarding the economic performance of rotational grazing?
10. What is your opinion of rotational grazing as a forage production system?
11. Is it easy or difficult to find information on rotational grazing?
12. Do you think someone else getting into farming today could farm like you do? Why or why not?
13. What are the skills and gifts that are the most important to you for a successful farm operation?
14. Do you have friendships with farmers where sharing information and ideas on farming are important to you?

15. How would you define what it means to be a successful farmer?
16. What are your goals for your farm?
17. Is there anything else you wanted to say? Anything I didn't cover?

Questions for agricultural professionals:

1. How do you work with graziers? Do you work only with dairy graziers? What about beef and pork graziers?
2. Why do you think there is increased interest in rotational grazing among farmers in the dairy/livestock community?
3. What do you think are the biggest challenges for beginning dairy farmers getting into rotational grazing? What about for beginning beef and pork farmers?
4. Is there adequate land available in your area for beginning farmers interested in rotational grazing?
5. Why do some dairy/livestock farmers choose not to transition to rotational grazing?
6. What do you think are the biggest challenges for current farmers transitioning to rotational grazing?
7. Are there different challenges for farmers getting into beef rotational grazing (compared to dairy grazing)? What about for pork?
8. What kind of resources are available for beginning farmers interested in getting into rotational grazing?
9. What kind of resources are available for conventional farmers interested in transitioning to rotational grazing?
10. Do you think these resources are adequate?
11. Are there differences in the resources available for dairy graziers versus beef graziers? Pork graziers?
12. What do you think your agency could do to make it easier for farmers to get into rotational grazing? Do you think the state could do more to support grazing? What about USDA?
13. Is there coordination among county, UW Extension, DATCP and NRCS on grazing issues?
14. Do you think there are regional differences within the state in terms of the types of resources being offered to farmers interested in rotational grazing? If so, what are they?

15. Do you know of counties (or other states) that are models for their work on rotational grazing? What are they?

16. What are your predictions for rotational grazing in Wisconsin? Will the number of farmers practicing rotational grazing in the state remain roughly the same? Increase? Decrease?

17. Is there anything else you wanted to say? Anything I didn't cover?