

Growing Wisconsin's Grazing Future

*Results of the Blue Sky Greener Pastures
Consultation Process*



July, 2012

Blue Sky Greener Pastures Steering Committee

Jack Kloppenburg, UW-Madison Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems

Dick Cates, UW-Madison Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems

Rhonda Gildersleeve, UW-Extension

Dave Johnson, GrassWorks Inc.

Kevin Mahalko, GrassWorks Inc.

Laura Paine, Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection

Steve Thomforde, UW-Madison Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems

The objective of the Blue Sky Greener Pastures project is to generate new initiatives and imaginative ideas (Blue Sky) to extend managed grazing and its benefits (Greener Pastures) to more producers, businesses, educators, consumers and communities. For more information on Blue Sky Greener Pastures, contact Jack Kloppenburg at 608.262.6867 or jrkloppe@wisc.edu.



This report is a joint effort of several organizations:

The **Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems (CIAS)** is a research center for sustainable agriculture in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, University of Wisconsin-Madison. CIAS fosters multidisciplinary inquiry and supports a range of research, curriculum, and program development projects. It brings together university faculty, farmers, policy makers and others to study relationships between farming practices, farm profitability, the environment and rural vitality. Go to www.cias.wisc.edu or call 608.262.5200 for more information.

GrassWorks, Inc. is a 20-year-old organization originally formed in Southern Wisconsin as part of the sustainable agriculture movement of the 1980s. As a member-based, producer-run 501(c)3 non-profit organization, GrassWorks works to support on-farm research, education and adoption of managed grazing. It is a voice for sustainable farming. Contact GrassWorks at info@grassworks.org or visit www.grassworks.org for more information.

University of Wisconsin-Extension provides statewide access to university resources and research so the people of Wisconsin can learn, grow and succeed at all stages of life. UW-Extension carries out this tradition of the Wisconsin Idea—extending the boundaries of the university to the boundaries of the state—through its four divisions of continuing education, cooperative extension, entrepreneurship, and economic development and broadcast and media innovations. Go to www.uwex.edu for more information.

The **Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP)** works to make Wisconsin a world leader in agriculture, food safety and consumer protection. DATCP is responsible for food safety, animal and plant health, protecting water and soil, and monitoring fair and safe business practices. The DATCP Grazing Program, housed in the Division of Agricultural Development, provides support to producers interested in grazing and offers links to educational resources, grant opportunities and upcoming events. For more information, visit datcp.state.wi.us or call 608.224.5120.

The Blue Sky Greener Pastures steering committee is grateful to the agencies and organizations that contributed to this project, including GrassWorks, Inc., the UW-Madison College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, UW-Extension, the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection and the UW-Madison Wisconsin Institute for Sustainable Agriculture. We especially appreciate the energy and creativity contributed by the 166 members of the Wisconsin agricultural community who participated in the listening sessions. Special thanks go to Val Adamski and Jennifer Taylor, who contributed their vision at a critical early stage and helped shape how the project unfolded. Funding for this project was provided by the Wisconsin Institute for Sustainable Agriculture. This report has been slightly revised from the January 2012 version.

Publication design and layout by Ruth McNair, CIAS

Photos: Jack Kloppenburg and CIAS file photos

Editorial review provided by Vance Haugen, Joel McNair and Carol Williams.

Table of contents

Executive summaryii

Blue Sky Greener Pastures recommendationsiii

Introduction1

Education for established graziers4

Education for beginning and transitioning farmers7

Networking10

Research13

Marketing16

Policy19

Growing Wisconsin's Grazing Future

Results of the Blue Sky Greener Pastures consultation process

Executive summary

For a wide variety of economic, environmental and social reasons, it makes good sense to regard the practice of managed grazing as an effective system for strengthening dairy and livestock farming in Wisconsin. **Managed grazing** is a system in which farmers rely on pasture as the primary source of forages for their livestock during the growing season and move their animals to fresh pastures regularly, giving grazed areas adequate time to rest and regrow. Farms that use managed grazing are called both grass-based and pasture-based farms. The farmers who use managed grazing are called **graziers**.

Despite a robust network of graziers and its apparent advantages, the growth of managed grazing appears to have plateaued at about a quarter of dairy farms and 42 percent of beef operations.

The UW-Madison Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems (CIAS) partnered with GrassWorks, Inc. to develop a statewide, participatory discussion process that they called “Blue Sky Greener Pastures” (BSGP). Funded by the UW-Madison Wisconsin Institute for Sustainable Agriculture, **the objective of the project was to generate new initiatives and imaginative ideas (Blue Sky) to extend managed grazing and its benefits (Greener Pastures) to more producers, businesses, educators, consumers and communities.**

The operational core of the BSGP process was a series of different listening sessions held in the summer and fall of 2010 at four locations throughout the state. The BSGP Steering Committee, which includes members from UW-Madison, UW-Extension, Wisconsin DATCP and GrassWorks, together developed a list of interested stakeholders to invite to listening sessions and also publicized the meetings as open to all interested parties. A total of 166 grazing stakeholders participated in these sessions.

Participants at the meetings discussed the question, **“What would you want to do to move managed grazing forward in Wisconsin, if you had all the resources you needed?”** Participants were free to move the discussion in whatever direction they desired. They discussed obstacles and opportunities in expanding the adoption of managed grazing, as well as the roles of farmers, business people, researchers and government agencies. They were also asked to use brainstormed ideas as foundations for proposing potential projects for moving grazing forward in the state. Participants received detailed summaries of each listening session.

This report synthesizes the discussions from the BSGP regional listening sessions. The analysis is organized around six recurring themes: education for established graziers, education for beginning and transitioning farmers, networking, research, marketing and policy.

In each of these six areas, the BSGP Steering Committee offers a number of concrete recommendations that—given participants’ perceptions, perspectives and advice—made sense to the committee as reasonable ways forward. These suggestions, listed below, are what might be called “recommendations of the middle.” The steering committee aimed to make them not too big, and not too small, with a focus on those that are plausible. While challenging, they are real possibilities. The recommendations are intended less as a program ready to be implemented than as a set of goals that, with energy and commitment, can be realized.

The BSGP Steering Committee looks forward to being part of the ongoing discussions that this report will stimulate among those who see the growth and success of managed grazing as a key feature of a sustainable and resilient agriculture in Wisconsin.

Blue Sky Greener Pastures recommendations

Synthesized by the steering committee from the 2010 listening sessions

Education for established graziers

1. **Pasture walks and beyond.** Develop a program of pasture walks aligned to the needs and interests of established/experienced graziers. Explore the prospects for developing continuing education on advanced grazing topics in the off-season, in a variety of venues and formats (brown-bags, mini-conferences, workshops, seminars) in cooperation with extension, technical college, university and business personnel.
2. **Keep a record.** Develop recordkeeping protocols/templates for financial and operational dimensions of managed grazing so farmers can track their progress and compare performance with other farmers.
3. **Use the wisdom of the elders.** Identify graziers with well-established expertise and/or communication skills, and develop a systematic way of sharing of their insights and perspectives within the managed grazing community and through outreach to allies and associates. This effort also supports beginning farmer educational needs.
4. **Create an information clearinghouse.** Create a single, one-stop, web-based clearinghouse that functions as a portal for access to a comprehensive set of information sources on managed grazing.

Education for beginning and transitioning farmers

5. **Enhance and expand existing opportunities for managed grazing training.** Existing programs should be analyzed for their impacts, adapted for maximum effectiveness and supported with adequate financial and technical resources to make them sustainable for the long term.
6. **Create new opportunities for managed grazing training.** Topics of particular need include farm management, financial planning and arrangements for inter-generational management and equity transfers. Develop training materials for new and transitioning farmers as needed and make them widely accessible.
7. **Reach out to retiring farmers.** Working closely with retiring farmers, establish programs that can provide resources and technical assistance and a means of identifying and working with beginning farmers to successfully transfer farms to the next generation. Develop and implement policies that encourage and facilitate interactions and farm transfers between retiring and beginning farmers.
8. **Prepare the next generation of farmers and consumers.** Develop K-12 grazing curricula and courses that introduce the practices and benefits of managed grazing to the next generation of farmers and consumers. Especially, provide field trips and experiential opportunities for students to learn about managed grazing. Reinforce these hands-on experiences with information provided through interactive social media.
9. **Attract resources from outside agriculture.** Explore opportunities and mechanisms to acquire capital and land for managed grazing from outside agriculture. Given the social and environmental benefits associated with managed grazing, it should be possible to attract material support from consumers,

conservation/environmental organizations and private investors interested in advocating sustainability in the food system.

Networking

10. **Identify or create an “umbrella organization” for managed grazing.** The managed grazing community needs the leadership and coordination of an organization capable of providing a statewide level of coherence and direction.
11. **Strengthen existing networks.** The organizational backbone of the managed grazing community has been the local and regional networks created by and for graziers. These networks should be strengthened to preserve and expand their capacity.
12. **Utilize social media.** A wide variety of information technology (e.g., video, Twitter, Facebook, blogs) can effectively and efficiently link individuals and organizations. The grazing movement should seek to use these powerful channels of communication whenever possible and appropriate.
13. **Extend grazing networks to include or link to partners wherever possible.** The grazing community needs not only to identify social groups, organizations and institutions that can act as partners, it also needs to establish and nurture robust linkages to them. This function will be especially critical for a prospective umbrella organization for managed grazing.
14. **Develop a grazing speakers bureau.** Identify individuals who are both skilled graziers and skilled speakers. Develop a list of people who can speak persuasively and authoritatively on the benefits of managed grazing for farmers, consumers, communities and the landscape. Publicize the availability of these speakers widely and coordinate their speaking engagements.

Research

15. **Establish a consistent portal to the University.** Create a committee of graziers who are charged with developing and maintaining a continuous and systematic relationship with university researchers in order to share ideas for research topics and facilitating collaborative partnerships between graziers and researchers.
16. **Develop a systems approach to research.** Ultimately, there is a need for a new form of knowledge production—“sustainability science”—in order to effectively understand and engage the complexity and interconnectedness of biophysical and human systems. Managed grazing represents an ideal platform from which researchers and farmers can work jointly to begin this difficult but critical movement away from reductionism and toward a systems perspective.
17. **Develop appropriate University component research efforts that feed into strong systems/research efforts.** Wisconsin has suffered extensive erosion of grazing-related component research programs over the past 20 years. Managed grazing encompasses a set of technical and social practices that are unique from those associated with other farming systems. Understanding these component differences, specifying them accurately and determining their differential advantages continues to be necessary if producers, consumers and policy makers are to make informed decisions on the farm, in the marketplace and in governance.

- 18. Build on the knowledge-producing capacities of graziers.** Farmers have valuable knowledge and experience. Both university staff and farmers should take advantage of opportunities for participatory, collaborative and on-farm research. A list of graziers willing to work with university researchers should be compiled. Graziers should also take the initiative to develop their own, autonomous research projects. Efforts should be made to identify “master” graziers and seek their involvement in university, collaborative and producer research projects.
- 19. Develop and maintain a database of funding sources.** No research can be accomplished without adequate material support. Even in this era of constrained budgets, funding remains available from a variety of public and private sources. A continuously updated list of funding opportunities should be made available to the managed grazing community. An initial compilation has been made by the staff working on BSGP and is available at www.cias.wisc.edu/bsgp/.
- 20. Consider establishing a farmer-funded grazing research structure.** Farmer funding engenders ownership of the research and research topics. The research would, by nature, be responsive to farmer needs. Graziers would have a more secure “seat at the table” of university research if they brought funding with them.
- 21. Learning in place.** A practical, producer-oriented, systems approach to research on managed grazing would be best pursued in a place and on a farm dedicated to managed grazing. Establishment of such a facility for managed dairy grazing research should be pursued to complement existing university research facilities for beef (Lancaster) and sheep (Spooner). A 2007 proposal from UW-Madison faculty for development of a managed dairy grazing experiment station provides a robust starting point for such an initiative.

Marketing

- 22. Brand pasture-based agriculture.** Wisconsin has more than 7,000 livestock and dairy producers who identify themselves as using managed grazing. A Wisconsin branded program for grass-fed products would provide a benefit to both individual and collective marketing efforts and, if it were a fee-based program, could potentially generate funding for marketing and infrastructure development. Providing producers with access to structures for segregating and collectively marketing Wisconsin grass-fed products would foster growth of this sector. A premium for these value-added products would encourage more producers to convert to well-managed, pasture-based systems.
- 23. Establish explicit standards for “grass-fed.”** Defining what “grass-fed” means will protect the integrity of this emerging market, provide a consistently high quality product and allow grazing farmers to reap the benefits of its popularity.
- 24. Cooperate to aggregate product.** A national market for grass-fed meat and dairy products exists and it will continue to grow in response to consumer demand. BSGP participants said that there is significant interest in working together to foster growth of this market to benefit Wisconsin farmers and to support growth of well-managed grazing in this state.
- 25. Identify and build on successful marketing.** An inventory of existing resources and ongoing efforts is a good first step toward developing a coordinated strategy for growing the grass-fed market in Wisconsin. The grazing community can learn from, support and build on the successes of more than 100 individual

direct marketers, the Wisconsin Grass-fed Beef Co-op, other collective marketing efforts and the projects of the DATCP grass-fed market development program.

- 26. Promote managed grazing as an option that is relevant to any livestock farm.** Managed grazing encompasses a set of component practices, many of which are compatible with any existing system of livestock and dairy farming. Outreach to farmers and farm organizations should be framed in ways that downplay a “different and better” stance and approach the discussion in terms of the adaptability of managed grazing to any farming system.

Policy

- 27. Clarify the context.** Undertake a study that inventories the full range of local, state and federal policies and regulations that affect managed grazing, and systematically identifies those that most closely support or constrain the effectiveness and expansion of managed grazing. Identify policies that could be modified to encourage adoption of managed grazing.
- 28. A voice for graziers.** Critically assess the role and function of organizations that serve the managed grazing community, and work with the community to develop an organization capable of speaking and working on behalf of all graziers.
- 29. Specify the benefits.** Compile a summary of the empirically established social, economic and environmental benefits of managed grazing and craft a portfolio of outreach materials capable of effectively educating consumers and decision-makers on managed grazing.
- 30. Recruit and cultivate partners.** Identify agencies and organizations working on policy-related activities whose core interests align with those of managed grazing, and systematically work to establish cooperative and mutually supportive relationships with them. Jointly develop effective messages about managed grazing.

Introduction

“Pasture-based systems are one of the keys to preserving Wisconsin’s working lands.” **Rod Nilsestuen—Wisconsin Secretary of Agriculture, 2003—2010**

Dairy and livestock production and processing account for more than half of Wisconsin’s \$59 billion agricultural economy,¹ and pasture-based systems are playing an increasingly important role in the viability of that economy. Wisconsin’s dairy farm numbers dropped from about 30,000 in 1993² to fewer than 11,600 in September 2011.³ The number of dairy operations using managed grazing (defined as moving cows to fresh pasture at least once a week) tripled between 1993 and 1999,⁴ and have since maintained steady, but slower, growth to about a quarter of all dairy farms in 2010.⁵ How have managed grazing dairy farmers been able to maintain their numbers while the total number of dairy farms has declined? It may be that farms using managed grazing have weathered hard times better than other dairies, and that additional farmers have adopted managed grazing as a strategy to help them start or stay in business.

The recent blossoming of Wisconsin’s artisan cheese industry is another step in the state’s grass-based revolution, with several outstanding cheeses being produced using milk from grass-based farms.⁶ Wisconsin pastures can support similarly innovative craft-meat, wool and leather industries. Since pasture-based farming tends to require fewer inputs than conventional systems, it also offers an opportunity to reduce Wisconsin’s dependency on fossil

fuels. On managed grazing farms, animals harvest most of their own feed and spread their own manure during the grazing season, reducing farmers’ reliance on fossil fuel-burning equipment to do these tasks.

Farms using managed grazing can help revitalize their local communities. Managed grazing dairy farms are smaller, on average, than other dairy farms in Wisconsin.⁷ Smaller dairy farms have been shown to make more purchases locally than large farms,⁸ keeping the local economy strong. For economic, environmental and social reasons, it makes good sense to regard the practice of managed grazing as an effective tool for strengthening dairy and livestock farming. As former Wisconsin Secretary of Agriculture Rod Nilsestuen observed, productively using the ecosystem services provided by pasturelands should be a prime means for sustaining both farm families and farmlands in Wisconsin.

Despite a robust network of producers, the apparent advantages of managed grazing and institutional support, the rapid growth of managed grazing during the 1990s appears to have plateaued at about a quarter of dairy farms⁹ and 42 percent of beef operations.¹⁰ Nearly half of dairy and beef operations not using managed grazing have significant pasture acreages and would appear to be prime candidates for a transition to more intensive grazing practices.¹¹

¹Deller, S.C. and D. Williams. August 2009. *The Contribution of Agriculture to the Wisconsin Economy*. Madison, WI: UW-Madison Agriculture and Applied Economics Staff Paper 541. Accessed 1/2012 (www.aae.wisc.edu/pubs/sps/pdf/stpap541.pdf).

²USDA NASS. October 2005. *Wisconsin 2005 Agricultural Statistics*. Madison: USDA NASS Field Office, p. 49. Accessed 1/2012 (www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics_by_State/Wisconsin/Publications/Annual_Statistical_Bulletin/as05web).

³USDA NASS. October 2011. *Wisconsin 2011 Agricultural Statistics*. Madison: USDA NASS Field office, p.43. Accessed 1/2012 (www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics_by_State/Wisconsin/Publications/Annual_Statistical_Bulletin/bulletin2011_web.pdf).

⁴Taylor, J. and J. Foltz. January, 2006. *Grazing in the Dairy State*. Madison: UW-Madison CIAS, p. 3. Accessed 1/2012 (www.cias.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2008/07/statusgrz.pdf).

⁵Paine, L. and R. Gildersleeve. n.d. *A Summary of Dairy Grazing Practices in Wisconsin*. Madison: Wisconsin DATCP. Accessed 1/2012 (datcp.wi.gov/uploads/Farms/pdf/2011DairyGrazingSummary.pdf).

⁶Paine, L. August, 2009. *Grass-based dairy products: challenges and opportunities*. Madison: UW-Madison CIAS. Accessed 1/2012 (www.cias.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/gbdairyreportfinalowres.pdf).

⁷Paine, L. and R. Gildersleeve. *Summary of Dairy Grazing*.

⁸Foltz, J.D., D. Jackson-Smith and L. Chen. April 2002. *Do Purchasing Patterns Differ Between Large and Small Dairy Farms? Econometric Evidence from Three Wisconsin Communities*. Agricultural and Resource Economics Review 31 (1): 28-38. Accessed 1/2012 (ageconsearch.umn.edu/bitstream/31485/1/31010028.pdf).

⁹Paine, L. and R. Gildersleeve. *Summary of Dairy Grazing*.

¹⁰Paine, L. and R. Gildersleeve. n.d. *A Summary of Beef Grazing Practices in Wisconsin*. Madison: Wisconsin DATCP. Accessed 1/2012 (datcp.wi.gov/uploads/Farms/pdf/2011BeefGrazingSummary.pdf).

¹¹USDA NASS. 2007. *USDA Census of Agriculture, 2007*. Extracted from raw census data by Laura Paine, Wisconsin DATCP.

The UW-Madison Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems (CIAS) partnered with GrassWorks to develop a statewide, participatory discussion process that they called “Blue Sky Greener Pastures” (BSGP). Funded by the Wisconsin Institute for Sustainable Agriculture, **the objective of the project was to generate new initiatives and imaginative ideas (Blue Sky) for extending the benefits of managed grazing (Greener Pastures) to more producers, businesses, educators, consumers and communities.**

Principal investigator for the project, Jack Kloppenburg, worked with GrassWorks to call together representatives from within some of the key groups working on managed grazing in Wisconsin: UW-Madison, UW-Extension, GrassWorks and the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection. These representatives formed the BSGP Steering Committee. Its role was to develop the BSGP process, facilitate the meetings and synthesize the results. In addition, the grant provided funds to hire project assistants to carry out some of the work: for example, setting up meeting arrangements and compiling mailing lists.

The Blue Sky Greener Pastures process

Grazing in Wisconsin has always been characterized by extensive communication at the grassroots level. The BSGP Steering Committee sought to capitalize on that tradition with a series of listening sessions held at four locations throughout the state. The group’s intent was to provide a space for discovering and sharing ideas generated within the grazing community, foster connections among people with similar goals, and facilitate the realization of the visions they shared.

Open invitations to people interested in managed grazing were issued through a variety of channels including grazing networks, academic institutions, state, county and federal agencies, agricultural professionals and the news media. Listening sessions were held in 2010 on August 5 (Arlington), October 25 (Richland Center), November 3 (Eau Claire)

and November 8 (Oshkosh). A total of 166 grazing stakeholders participated at these locations.

All four listening sessions followed a common protocol. First, in a “Blue Sky Brainstorm Activity,” attendees were asked to respond to the question, **“What would you want to do to move managed grazing forward in Wisconsin, if you had all the resources you needed?”** Each person wrote a response (or responses) on a post-it note and shared them verbally with the group. Participants grouped related responses into clusters. Over lunch, the BSGP Steering Committee reviewed the responses and clusters and refined them into six thematic groups. In the afternoon, each participant attended two small group discussion sessions focused on one of the six themes. They were also asked to use brainstormed ideas as foundations for proposing potential projects for moving grazing forward in the state. Participants were free to move the discussion in whatever direction they desired. They discussed obstacles and opportunities in expanding the adoption of managed grazing, as well as the roles of farmers, business people, researchers and government agencies. Participants received detailed summaries of each listening session.

On December 10, 2010, a plenary session was held in Marshfield. The goal of this session was to distill ideas from the four listening sessions into projects with broad interest, and to identify an energetic champion to move them forward. This session was attended by 42 people, nearly all of whom had attended one of the previous four listening sessions. The list of potential projects had been summarized, edited and organized by BSGP staff into the six themes identified by the steering committee.

A central objective of the Marshfield plenary was to foster the formation of working groups around specific initiatives. Ten potential working groups emerged from this exercise, and four of these are currently being actively advanced. Several BSGP Steering Committee members are also involved in the development of additional projects. To identify



Graduate assistant Steve Thomforde leads a discussion at one of the BSGP listening sessions

sources of financial support for emergent initiatives, the BSGP staff has compiled an extensive list of funding sources relevant to grazing projects, as well as an annotated bibliography of research on managed grazing. See www.cias.wisc.edu/bsgp/ for the latest BSGP publications.

Themes from the grazing community discussion

In organizing the BSGP listening sessions, the steering committee hoped to stimulate ideas and discussion about how to move managed grazing forward that would result in concrete initiatives. But the discussion process can also be understood as an end in itself. The four regional listening sessions were attended by 166 people representing the breadth of the grazing community. Some 60 percent of these participants were producers, the remainder being processors, academics, educators, extension staff and representatives of government agencies and citizens' groups. This was a self-selected group of intelligent, engaged, knowledgeable people who share a commitment to helping managed grazing flourish in Wisconsin. The transcripts of the "Blue Sky Brainstorm" sessions are consequently a rich repository of data reflecting the current sense of the grazing community regarding the status and prospects of managed grazing in Wisconsin.

This report summarizes what was expressed during the BSGP regional listening sessions. There are, of course, many ways in which this sizeable body of commentary could be organized and interpreted. However, throughout the discussion process the

steering committee identified six recurring thematic areas. These areas are:

- Education for established graziers
- Education for beginning and transitioning farmers
- Networking
- Research
- Marketing
- Policy

The steering committee found these categories useful and used this framework to structure this report. While the analysis of the listening session discussions reflects the steering committee's interpretations of what was said, the "Participant voices" sidebars found throughout this report provide verbatim examples of the feedback received.

The steering committee also makes a number of concrete recommendations that—given participants' perceptions, perspectives and advice—make sense as reasonable ways forward. It is rarely easy to make recommendations on any complex matter. Too often, one lacks firm evidence for making choices. There is an inevitable tension between expansive vision and what can be readily achieved, between focusing on details and trying to encompass an entire system. The steering committee's suggestions, reported at the end of each section, are what might be called "recommendations of the middle." They have aimed to make them neither too big nor too small and, above all, plausible. They are challenging, yes, but they are also real possibilities. The steering committee offers them as a set of goals that, with energy and commitment, can be realized. This report, more than anything else, aspires to catalyze that energy and focus that commitment.

The remainder of this document highlights the discussion that occurred and the resulting recommendations in each of the six thematic areas listed above.

Education for established graziers

Managed grazing is no longer a novelty in Wisconsin agriculture. Of the dairy and beef farmers using managed grazing, about half have been using this system for more than a decade, and quite a few for an even longer period.¹² As a consequence, there exists among experienced graziers a rich and extensive pool of knowledge and expertise. Still, as with any management-intensive system, managed grazing is a dynamic and evolving practice that requires and rewards continuous learning.

Established graziers, no less than beginning and transitioning farmers, can and should benefit from educational opportunities.

One of the most striking and distinctive features of managed grazing in Wisconsin is the way in which farmers themselves have organized networks to generate and exchange the knowledge and information they need to effectively let animals and pastures work together in a system. The principal mechanism enabling this exchange of information has been the pasture walk. At pasture walks, farmers meet on a farm to look at different aspects of grazing management and discuss observations and ideas. While acknowledging the continued value of pasture walks, BSGP listening session participants felt some changes could be useful. In particular, there was a sense that pasture walks no longer hold the interest of experienced graziers. These graziers still appreciate pasture walks for the social interaction and sense of community they provide, but there was also a strong sense that there would be considerable value in:

- **developing a set of pasture walks that are organized around specific problems,**
- **making use of the full repertoire of knowledge and skills held by recognized grazing experts,**
- **and facilitating more complex and nuanced discussion than is found in a typical pasture walk.**

Pasture walks will certainly remain the keystone mechanism for information exchange among graziers. But as the managed grazing community grows in numbers, over time it also differentiates. There is a clear need to consider reorienting pasture walks to the differential needs of at least two audiences: beginning farmers and farmers transitioning (or considering a transition) to managed grazing; and experienced graziers.

As valuable as pasture walks are, there was also a sense among participants that additional venues and formats for learning and information exchange are needed. A variety of suggestions were made to move the basic model of the pasture walk indoors and off-season, and to cover topics that are not as easily addressed in the active walk format. While information sharing among farmers will remain an important part of this type of activity, there may be a need for a more structured educational format that includes bringing in expertise in the form of extension specialists and other speakers.

Participants recognized the potential of technical colleges, extension programs and conferences as sites for informal and/or formal classes on grazing issues. In addition, participants expressed interest in learning about an expanded range of topics beyond the agronomic and technical, including labor management, employee training, computer and internet use, and economic analysis.

One area of educational need was raised often enough to merit special comment: recordkeeping. Of necessity, graziers must be keen observers of the ecological relationships between sun, rain, grass, animals and other factors whose interactions produce the quantities of marketable milk or meat that critically determine socioeconomic sustainability. The ability of a grazer to make effective management decisions is in large measure a function of his or

¹²Paine, L. and R. Gildersleeve. *Summary of Dairy Grazing and Summary of Beef Grazing.*

her ability to recall and analyze observations. The ability to recall and analyze is materially improved by keeping accurate and complete records. But what data is to be recorded, when, in what format, how can it be interpreted and for what purposes? **BSGP participants recognized the importance of accurate recordkeeping and emphasized the need for clear, simple, easy-to-use templates for managing both finance and production records.** Though some financial templates are available, most are not designed for managed grazing. Members of the steering committee knew of no protocols for recording or interpreting the ecological/life cycle events and relationships that are critical to graziers whose knowledge of their particular farm and locality is so fundamental a component of the practice of managed grazing.

Established graziers can benefit from ongoing learning opportunities, but they can also be teachers and mentors for beginning farmers. Some experienced graziers are already mentoring beginning graziers. BSGP participants commented on the desirability of mobilizing the expertise of experienced graziers for mutual learning. They further pointed to the opportunity to draw upon the skills of a smaller group of farmers who are widely acknowledged to be especially skilled and knowledgeable about grazing, or are particularly effective communicators. Participants suggested identifying such people and creating a way to find and contact them via a mechanism such as a grazing mentor list.

Additionally, participants felt that this cohort of grazing experts would be extremely useful in outreach to interests and constituencies who need to support managed grazing but who often don't understand it adequately: for example, local conservation



Experienced graziers benefit from pasture walks organized around specific problems or topics

groups or local chambers of commerce. For this purpose, **many participants supported the creation of a managed grazing speakers bureau staffed by experienced, articulate, respected graziers.**

Perhaps the most consistent comment from participants in relation to continuing education for established graziers was the **critical need for a well-organized, comprehensive and accessible source for reliable information** relevant to graziers' concerns and interests. There is an enormous amount of information out there, but it is widely dispersed, takes many different forms and is unevenly available.

One participant summed it up: "So much information, dispersed amongst several agencies; need basic, clear information, from a one-time stop shop." The challenge is providing a channel or tool that acts as an effective portal to the information sources that meet graziers' needs.

Accordingly, the steering committee recommends a number of initiatives that would provide ways for established graziers to continue their education and to educate others.

- 1. Pasture walks and beyond.** Develop a program of pasture walks aligned to the needs and interests of established/experienced graziers. Explore the prospects for developing continuing education on advanced grazing topics in the off-season, in a variety of venues and formats (brown-bags, mini-conferences, workshops, seminars) in cooperation with extension, technical college, university and business personnel.
- 2. Keep a record.** Develop recordkeeping protocols/templates for financial and operational dimensions of managed grazing so farmers can track their progress and compare performance with other farmers.
- 3. Use the wisdom of the elders.** Identify graziers with well-established expertise and/or communication skills, and develop a systematic way of sharing of their insights and perspectives within the managed grazing community and through outreach to allies and associates. This effort also supports beginning farmer educational needs.
- 4. Create an information clearinghouse.** Create a single, one-stop, web-based clearinghouse that functions as a portal for access to a comprehensive set of information sources on managed grazing.

Education for established graziers: *Participant voices*

“Organize one-day sessions on advanced grazing topics like soil fertility and forage quality; these could be organized during the winter months”

“Pasture walks should continue, and increase in quality, and extend to winter brown bags”

“Design a good standard pasture based production recordkeeping system”

“Train producers to do a better job of financial recordkeeping”

“Develop an ongoing list of veteran graziers to serve as regional mentors”

“Educate consultants/extension agents to support graziers and outline mechanisms that make grazing successful”

“Need to develop a translator of hard core research into farmer-friendly reports”

“There should be someone or an organization that looks at information and how it applies to the farm, making it tangible to the farmer without putting a marketing slant on it.”

Education for beginning and transitioning farmers

Farming remains one of the few occupations in the United States that is assumed to be handed down across generations. Traditionally, learning to farm has been a matter of following in the footsteps of an elder family member. Participants in the BSGP listening sessions, without exception, expressed concern and frustration that Wisconsin has yet to develop a coherent, recognizable, accepted path for entry into farming and career development, and particularly into pasture-based farming. Perceptions of obstacles to getting started in farming, and specifically grazing, were consistent across listening sessions and can be categorized as: 1) education for youth and potential new farmers, 2) beginning farmer entry/career pathway development, and 3) farmland availability/elder farmer transitions.

Comments regarding youth and beginning farmer issues are well summarized by the statement of one participant that, “**...the process of entering farming needs to be made easier, more efficient and more profitable with identifiable key starting points.**” Exposure to managed grazing in high school curricula is an important early step, but a farmer career pathway with mentorship, financial assistance and apprenticeships for building opportunities (in sum, a remake of the “sharemilker”

concept) that encompasses the realities and values of young American entrepreneurs is needed. Farmer and farm community networking are key, but so is the engagement of the business and environmental communities, consumers and the public. Although traditional sources for start-up loans, such as the USDA FSA Beginning Farmer Loan Program, are available for people to start new farming operations, **BSGP participants expressed a need to attract capital from other sources—perhaps outside of agriculture—to train a new generation of farmers seeking to implement pasture-based agriculture.**

It is important to note that a variety of programs for getting new farmers started with grazing are already in place. These include the Wisconsin School for Beginning Dairy and Livestock Farmers (WSBDF) located at the UW-Madison Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems (also available via distance education), courses at UW-River Falls and several Wisconsin technical college campuses, UW-Extension grazing schools, the UCAN FARM website, the DATCP Farm Center for business planning, grazing networks, technical assistance providers, the USDA EQIP/GLCI programs, and Wisconsin state funding for grazing education, outreach, research and technical training.

Especially notable is the new dairy grazing apprenticeship program via GrassWorks, the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development and the WSBDF. A newly published WSBDF mentor-intern handbook, *Passing Along Farm Knowledge*, is available on the CIAS website at www.cias.wisc.edu. Efforts are needed to continue to promote the successful ongoing activities listed above in the short term while initiating new mid- and long-term projects identified by BSGP participants.

Participants expressed a wide variety of suggestions for enhancing existing programs and initiating new



Internships with experienced farmers can be a valuable part of a farming career pathway



Students in the Wisconsin School for Beginning Dairy and Livestock Farmers learn about managed grazing and business planning

ones. Ideas for preparing the next generation of pasture-based farmers included developing:

- K-12 and post-secondary grazing curricula and courses with field trips and experiential opportunities,
- online interactive social media to facilitate information sharing,
- regional and local hands-on grazing summer schools,
- courses on farm business/financial planning for beginning farmers,
- and farms used exclusively to teach grazing practices to students.

Project ideas to address beginning farmer entry and career pathway development included developing a mentorship program for beginning and transitioning farmers, technical and financial resources for mentors, programs that link existing graziers with new/beginning farmers, case studies of successful transitions from conventional to managed grazing, expanding grazing apprenticeship programs and establishing incubator/training farms.

For established farmers interested in making the transition to managed grazing, participants expressed

concern about inadequate policy and financial “incentives and mechanisms for transferring farms and farmland across generations.” They discussed a need for policy that provides a transition gateway between retiring and start-up farmers. As one participant summed it up, “...the old and young generations need to meet in the middle somehow.”

Farm land availability and elder farmer transitioning project suggestions included:

- identifying various agencies and resources that could partner with farmers and rural communities to develop farm succession/transfer solutions,
- investigating regional public or private land (e.g. road right-of-ways, school lands, DNR lands and corporate campuses) that could be made available to new graziers,
- developing tax incentives to sell and/or lease land to start-up graziers,
- conducting research into how present farm programs could be modified to encourage and support grazing farm development,
- and exploring methods to attract capital and land provision from outside agriculture (e.g., from interested consumers or conservation/environmental organizations).

There are existing programs, which could be expanded, that provide models of what can realistically be accomplished. These include the UW-Madison pasture management field study class, the Northcentral Technical College Dairyland Academy, the Taylor County community development block grant revolving fund that underwrites conversion of small conventional farms to grazing farms, the Crawford County project to attract new farmers, and Wisconsin legislation offering tax incentives for leasing land to new farmers.

Accordingly, the steering committee recommends:

5. **Enhance and expand existing opportunities for managed grazing training.** Existing programs should be analyzed for their impacts, adapted for maximum effectiveness and supported with adequate financial and technical resources to make them sustainable for the long term.
6. **Create new opportunities for managed grazing training.** Topics of particular need include farm management, financial planning and arrangements for inter-generational management and equity transfers. Develop training materials for new and transitioning farmers as needed and make them widely accessible.
7. **Reach out to retiring farmers.** Working closely with retiring farmers, establish programs that can provide resources and technical assistance and a means of identifying and working with beginning farmers to successfully transfer farms to the next generation. Develop and implement policies that encourage and facilitate interactions and farm transfers between retiring and beginning farmers.
8. **Prepare the next generation of farmers and consumers.** Develop K-12 grazing curricula and courses that introduce the practices and benefits of managed grazing to the next generation of farmers and consumers. Especially, provide field trips and experiential opportunities for students to learn about managed grazing. Reinforce these hands-on experiences with information provided through interactive social media.
9. **Attract resources from outside agriculture.** Explore opportunities and mechanisms to acquire capital and land for managed grazing from outside agriculture. Given the social and environmental benefits associated with managed grazing, it should be possible to attract material support from consumers, conservation/environmental organizations and private investors interested in advocating sustainability in the food system.

Education for beginning and transitioning farmers: *Participant voices*

“Develop land transfer assistance bulletins”

“Create labor pools of apprentices, interns, summer work students”

“Develop mentor/internship training manuals”

“Develop ‘starting over’ information, including programs, financial assistance, knowledge”

“I would like to see more involvement with high school students, pasture walks, classroom presentations”

“We need to identify ways that make it feasible to transfer grass farms to beginners”

“Media and curriculum for kids that promote grazing”

“Develop an apprentice program, where beginners can live and work with grass veterans”

Networking

Given the relative scarcity of formal, university-based research on managed grazing, graziers depend on each other for knowledge. In coming to see themselves as the most accessible source of effective knowledge on managed grazing, they have also developed innovative modes of exchanging and sharing that knowledge. Over the past two decades, they have developed groups to effectively share information. Graziers have formed a wide variety of locally and regionally based networks designed to openly share their experiences of, and their thoughts on, pasture-based farming. The BSGP listening sessions produced abundant commentary on the need to maintain and expand this key activity of networking. There was broad consensus that established local and regional grazing networks ought to be strengthened in order to increase the rate, quantity and quality of information flow within the grazing community.

The most common networking theme related to a perceived need to **identify or create an “umbrella organization” capable of providing a statewide level of coherence and coordination to the entire managed grazing community.** The current structure of regional and local groups has been extremely successful in providing opportunities



Pasture walks are a useful way for farmers to connect with each other on the farm

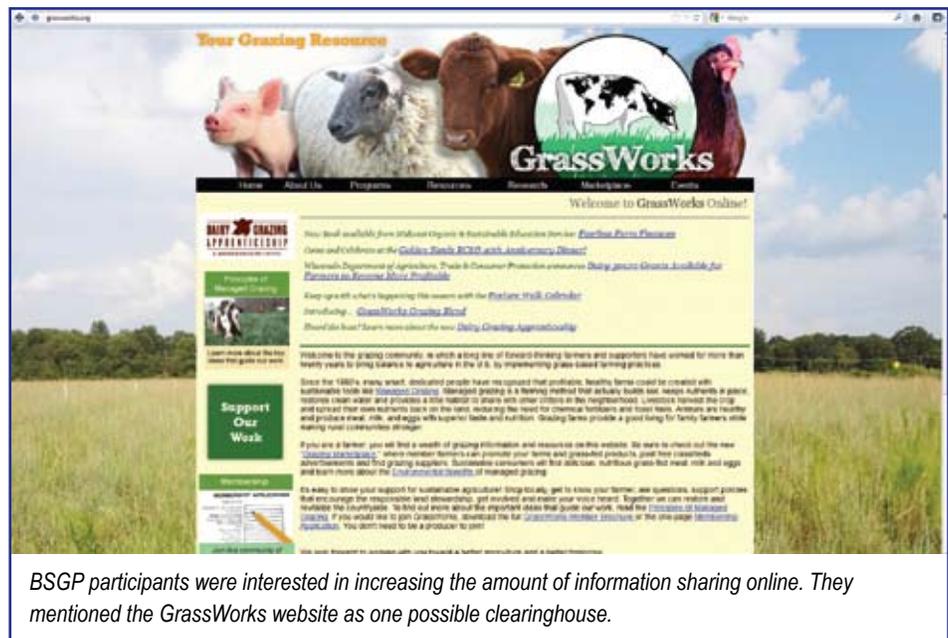
for graziers to meet and learn from each other. However, many participants felt that the managed grazing movement has matured to a point at which a comprehensive organizational framework is needed. Such an organization would engage stakeholders and extend discussion and enquiry beyond production questions and the farm gate to encompass ecological, organizational, energy, marketing and policy issues. Participants also outlined the ways in which an umbrella organization could create a framework for acquiring and disseminating information through a variety of venues (paper, web and experiential formats) and could also be responsible for cultivating partnerships with other interest groups. Participants identified GrassWorks as the logical organization to assume this role. However, GrassWorks' current capacity to achieve “umbrella organization” status is constrained by several factors, including lack of financial resources and low membership rates.

Listening session participants also commented on the need to have existing networks improve their capacity to distribute information. Reports and bulletins on basic pasture management and profitability, announcements of technical and financial programs, lists of service providers and contact information for experienced/mentor graziers were among the types of information for which the most need was expressed. This information could be made available via mail, on websites and at pasture walks, conferences and other events. Some networks already do this. UW-Extension could be a valuable partner in this activity. The challenge is identifying or creating an organizational structure capable of coordinating this activity so that information is readily available to producers wherever they are in the state.

There was also considerable interest in making effective use of social media that is rapidly becoming a major channel of communication for organizations as well as individuals (e.g., “create a Facebook site for Wisconsin Grass”). The web enables a low-cost

means of providing information that could effectively facilitate communication and scheduling within and between local and regional grazing networks (e.g., “create an updatable calendar list of grazing programs and events”). Participants suggested using YouTube videos to enable sharing of experience and information among graziers (e.g., “capture the knowledge of veteran graziers, in film, in text, video, voice and so forth”) and provide a familiar mechanism for outreach to consumers or policy makers.

Participants were keenly aware of the potential to expand grazing, and support for grazing, by extending networks to encompass linkages with interest groups and organizations outside grazing. One core function of a managed grazing umbrella organization would be to develop and nurture a high-level network of allied institutions and organizations supportive of managed grazing. (e.g., “GrassWorks to provide monthly updates to RC &Ds about what it has been working on,” “identify and establish an outreach program for institutional allies: Ducks Unlimited, Trout Unlimited, Audubon, The Nature Conservancy, Izaak Walton League, land trusts”). One participant suggested a “GrassWorks



Ambassador program” that would make prominent graziers available to organizations and programs interested in learning more about managed grazing.

One suggestion that the steering committee feels merits special attention is development of a managed grazing speakers bureau. **It is essential to reach outside of agriculture to build new partnerships with those who share the values of the grazing community in regard to issues of sustainability.** If the both farmers and the public begin to understand and embrace the untapped benefits of grazing, the sky becomes the limit—for financial assistance, policy change and attracting a next generation of the best and brightest new farm business entrepreneurs who can practice and enact these values.

The steering committee recommends several initiatives to increase the amount, rate and quality of information sharing both within the grazing community and with outside partners.

- 10. Identify or create an “umbrella organization” for managed grazing.** The managed grazing community needs the leadership and coordination of an organization capable of providing a statewide level of coherence and direction.
- 11. Strengthen existing networks.** The organizational backbone of the managed grazing community has been the local and regional networks created by and for graziers. These networks should be strengthened to preserve and expand their capacity.
- 12. Utilize social media.** A wide variety of information technology (e.g., video, Twitter, Facebook, blogs) can effectively and efficiently link individuals and organizations. The grazing movement should seek to use these powerful channels of communication whenever possible and appropriate.
- 13. Extend grazing networks to include or link to partners wherever possible.** The grazing community needs not only to identify social groups, organizations and institutions that can act as partners, it also needs to establish and nurture robust linkages to them. This function will be especially critical for a prospective umbrella organization for managed grazing.
- 14. Develop a grazing speakers bureau.** Identify individuals who are both skilled graziers and skilled speakers. Develop a list of people who can speak persuasively and authoritatively on the benefits of managed grazing for farmers, consumers, communities and the landscape. Publicize the availability of these speakers widely and coordinate their speaking engagements.

Networking: *Participant voices*

“Develop a “Northern Midwest Grazier Co-op” for seed and other materials”

“Expand the flow of communication between government, networks, GrassWorks, UW, UWEX”

“Develop an interactive website where services, needs, sales and discussions can be posted”

“Communicate results of tests, soil from grazed and un-grazed, soils under different grazing regimes, different animals, and continue this format for other pasture/non-pasture variables”

“Develop a list of support services, educational opportunities, loans, vets, nutritionists and so forth”

“List government grants for graziers on one or more websites”

“Develop tools and materials to reach out to the non-grazing community”

“Get better with the network model”

Research

Managed grazing is a knowledge-intensive undertaking. Although one hallmark of grazing has been the remarkable degree to which farmers have generated knowledge on their own terms and for their own purposes, participants in the listening sessions were adamant about the acute need for more research—especially at the UW-Madison. Commentary clustered around two principal themes. First, participants suggested topics on which useful research could and should be conducted. Second, there was much discussion about the process of study: how research activities might be organized and where and how they ought to be conducted. Overall, there was a clear and unambiguous sense at all sessions **that the current level of research—whether performed by farmers or by university and extension personnel—is insufficient to adequately support the growth of managed grazing in Wisconsin.**

Not unexpectedly, session participants generated a long list of research topics. Many of these focused on the biophysical components of managed grazing such as agronomics, animal husbandry, fencing and watering systems, and livestock genetics. In addition, there was a persistent concern for the need to address problems systemically. This was manifested especially in suggestions regarding grazing as a specific farming system. This affinity for a systems orientation to knowledge production was also evident in regard to the broader role of grazing practices themselves in their relation to the environment and even to the entire socio-biophysical system. As one participant put it, someone needs to “conduct meta-analysis on finance, environment, health of food and health of animals.” Participants especially noted the need for systemic research to identify and quantify the beneficial externalities and ecosystem services (soil fertility, biodiversity, nutrient regulation, water quality, human health) associated with pasture-based agriculture. If these could be documented, they could be a powerful argument in favor of managed grazing in marketing and policy frameworks.



There were almost as many suggestions for research on socioeconomic topics as there were for production. While some of these focused on financial and social stability, others addressed issues in the larger political and policy arenas such as the need to identify vacant or abandoned land suitable for grazing. A significant subset of participants argued for a research initiative to systematically assess the differential advantages associated with managed grazing and conventional systems. While some of this comparative work has been done (see especially publications by Tom Kriegl at www.cdp.wisc.edu), it has not reached as large an audience as it should, and there is a perception among many graziers that empirical comparisons between their system and conventional practices would be a significant tool in growing managed grazing. Several commentators called for case studies on why and how farmers transition from conventional to grazing practices.

At the listening sessions, there was a very clear desire for more research in all the areas noted above. Notably, **there was a clear indication that “more” should routinely include a socioeconomic component so that producers can evaluate and understand the human costs and benefits of a new practice.** There was also a persistent sense among a significant portion of the managed grazing community that UW-Madison researchers could be more attentive to their needs. While some state and federal funding has been available for grazing research over the last decade, managed grazing continues to be viewed as an “alternative” practice and is not well integrated into research

or educational programs at the university. This disconnect between grazing farmers and UW researchers is exacerbated by lack of a conduit for efficiently communicating research to graziers. If there is one thing that most participants in the listening sessions might agree with, it is the sentiment expressed by one farmer that, "...we need more research and advocacy for grazing by the University of Wisconsin."

There are some conflicts between the needs of graziers and those of researchers. Having peer-reviewed research articles published in journals is critical to building the careers of researchers, but some journals have had issues with the scientific rigor of on-farm research. In addition, researchers' agendas are influenced by available funding. How "more grazing research" is going to be accomplished, given the current fiscal reductions in the UW system and state agency budgets, is a significant concern. This moves the discussion from the question of "what" to study to the issue of "how" research is organized and structured. In an era of contracting budgets, listening session participants recognized that graziers need greater access to faculty and staff in research institutions. **Developing a consistent, institutionalized channel for connecting research faculty with the grazing community would be an important step forward.**

But given the relatively small number of formal researchers and the very large number of possible research projects, it makes sense to consider another underutilized resource: the creativity and knowledge production capacities of graziers themselves. Suggestions that emerged from these sessions embraced this participatory approach. A number of graziers have initiated their own informal research on farm, and a systematization of these procedures could supplement formal university research in useful ways. Information on funding sources capable of underwriting such on-farm and collaborative research is clearly needed. Another possibility would be some sort of farmer-funded research structure such as those established in Ireland or New Zealand, or a check-off arrangement as practiced in the

United States. Finally, participants saw establishment of place-based research farms or facilities dedicated to managed grazing as a desirable, if ambitious, goal.

The steering committee offers the following recommendations for enhancing managed grazing research in Wisconsin:

15. Establish a consistent portal to the University.

Create a committee of graziers who are charged with developing and maintaining a continuous and systematic relationship with university researchers in order to share ideas for research topics and facilitating collaborative partnerships between graziers and researchers.

16. Develop a systems approach to research.

Ultimately, there is a need for a new form of knowledge production—"sustainability science"—in order to effectively understand and engage the complexity and interconnectedness of biophysical and human systems. Managed grazing represents an ideal platform from which researchers and farmers can work jointly to begin this difficult but critical movement away from reductionism and toward a systems perspective.

17. Develop appropriate University component research efforts that feed into strong systems/ research efforts.

Wisconsin has suffered extensive erosion of grazing-related component research programs over the past 20 years. Managed grazing encompasses a set of technical and social practices that are unique from those associated with other farming systems. Understanding these component differences, specifying them accurately and determining their differential advantages continues to be necessary if producers, consumers and policy makers are to make informed decisions on the farm, in the marketplace and in governance.

18. Build on the knowledge-producing capacities of graziers. Farmers have valuable knowledge and experience. Both university staff and

farmers should take advantage of opportunities for participatory, collaborative and on-farm research. A list of graziers willing to work with university researchers should be compiled. Graziers should also take the initiative to develop their own, autonomous research projects. Efforts should be made to identify “master” graziers and seek their involvement in university, collaborative and producer research projects.

- 19. Develop and maintain a database of funding sources.** No research can be accomplished without adequate material support. Even in this era of constrained budgets, funding remains available from a variety of public and private sources. A continuously updated list of funding opportunities should be made available to the managed grazing community. An initial compilation has been made by the staff working on BSGP and is available at www.cias.wisc.edu/bsgp/.
- 20. Consider establishing a farmer-funded grazing research structure.** Farmer funding engenders ownership of the research and research topics. The research would, by nature, be responsive to farmer needs. Graziers would have a more secure “seat at the table” of university research if they brought funding with them.
- 21. Learning in place.** A practical, producer-oriented, systems approach to research on managed grazing would be best pursued in a place and on a farm dedicated to managed grazing. Establishment of such a facility for managed dairy grazing research should be pursued to complement existing university research facilities for beef (Lancaster) and sheep (Spooner). A 2007 proposal from UW-Madison faculty for development of a managed dairy grazing experiment station provides a robust starting point for such an initiative.

Research: *Participant voices*

“Develop a persistent legume and a grass that works with it”

“Need more research on the system impacts of high density grazing, impacts on soil biology, forage, etc.”

“Undertake research that compares grazing with conventional and/or CAFOs and examines the impacts of government policies on each”

“Identify grazing farms willing to participate in grazing research”

“Develop a ‘participatory breeding’ program”

“Develop pro-grazing teams to research and market results; teams should include farmers and UW researchers”

“Need to research how farmers conduct research and is there an opportunity to develop protocols to guide certain types of data collection”

“Purchase farms that are used to teach exclusively grazing practices to students through UW”

Marketing

Marketing was a popular topic during the BSGP listening sessions, with over 120 individual ideas and suggestions recorded. From this general subject emerged two related, but separate themes. The first is the actual marketing of grass-fed meat and dairy products, called “marketing grass-fed products.” The second is marketing the practice of grazing as a means of garnering public support, referred to herein as “marketing grazing.” While the subject matter within these two themes is similar, the activities associated with the respective efforts are significantly different, as are the desired outcomes. Building a market for grass-fed products involves development of infrastructure for financing, aggregation, processing and distribution in addition to the fundamental activities of marketing grass-fed products—and the concept of grazing—to consumers. The “marketing grazing” topic has a narrower range of activities but a broader reach, perhaps focusing on a more educational form of marketing and including other audiences, such as conservation organizations and government agencies, in addition to consumers.

Those attending BSGP listening sessions expressed great optimism about the market for grass-fed products. There was enthusiasm for the superiority of these products and their potential success in the marketplace. Participants recognized that marketing is about promoting a suite of features that consumers perceive as desirable. “Sell the sizzle, not

the steak,” suggested one participant. They identified a broad array of benefits of grazing: “animal health, environment, local economy, happy farmer, healthy foods,” in the words of another participant. Yet another observed that economic benefits can accrue not only to farmers but to local, state and regional economies.

One of the most common suggestions was developing branded programs for marketing Wisconsin grass-fed products. An obstacle identified by participants is the inability of existing agricultural marketing organizations such as the Milk Marketing Board and the Cattlemen’s Beef Council to promote niche markets for milk and meat without the appearance of favoritism. In attempting to provide marketing that represents all dairy or beef producers, these organizations are limited in their ability to promote value-added products for a subset of their members. Several participants envisioned generating marketing funding through a check-off program similar to those managed by these entities but focused on promoting grass-fed products, specifically. A check-off program could be tied to a branded product campaign and a certification process for the farms to ensure that they follow a verified grazing program.

The large number of ideas generated around the theme of marketing grazing (42) suggests that



participants were convinced of the value of managed grazing, but they felt that many others (such as consumers and agencies) are not aware of its many benefits. **There was a sense that it is not enough to build consumer demand, that there needs to be an educational effort aimed at the agricultural and conservation establishment.** There is still a degree of skepticism about grazing among mainstream farming organizations and institutions that needs to be overcome, as captured by the comment that the grazing community needs to, "...redefine grazing assumptions ... grazing is not farming to most farmers." Getting the farming community past these biases was viewed as a key to broader adoption of grazing. As one participant put it, the grazing community needs to market grazing as, "...conventional mainstream farming, not as experimental."

Using the same environmental, economic and community benefits identified for marketing grass-fed products, participants suggested reaching out to additional audiences including non-grazing farmers and farm organizations such as the Professional Dairy Producers of Wisconsin, the Wisconsin Farm Bureau and the Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board; conservation organizations such as Ducks Unlimited, Pheasants Forever and Audubon; and conservation agencies such as the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and county land conservation departments.

For both marketing themes, several ideas for projects or activities were repeatedly suggested. These included holding pasture walks for consumers and other non-farming audiences, establishing a grazing demonstration farm or tourism site similar to Fair Oaks (the large confinement dairy in Indiana), creating a documentary film about managed grazing and establishing a speakers bureau of grazing experts to offer presentations to organizations and target audiences. Some participants felt that further research is needed to generate data in support of the assertions that the grazing community is making, and that it should develop written materials such as case studies to highlight the financial and

environmental performance of grazing farms. In addition to the Wisconsin grass-fed branded program and the check-off, several participants voiced support for the concept of marketing cooperatives similar to the Wisconsin Grass-fed Beef Co-op and Organic Valley/CROPP Cooperative. Retailing suggestions included both getting more products into traditional grocery stores and food co-ops as well as alternative marketing approaches such as web-based sales, meat CSA arrangements and HMO rebates.

Infrastructure needed to foster growth in the grass-fed sector includes segregated processing capacity for both meat and dairy, cooperative kitchens and mobile slaughter facilities. One significant need that was not identified is the shortage of poultry processing facilities. Additional ideas included establishing markets for an array of livestock classes such as lamb, goat, poultry and swine, as well as additional products such as wool and leather. Participants recognized the need for market research to gain a better understanding of the grass-fed customer and to determine the most effective market venues for grass-fed products.

While the subject matter for marketing grazing is similar to that of marketing grass-fed products, the audience, goals and strategies for marketing grazing are closely aligned with BSGP policy themes. Recommendations in this area are made in the "Policy" section of this report. In regard to marketing grass-fed products, the steering committee makes the following recommendations:

22. Brand pasture-based agriculture. Wisconsin has more than 7,000 livestock and dairy producers who identify themselves as using managed grazing. A Wisconsin branded program for grass-fed products would provide a benefit to both individual and collective marketing efforts and, if it were a fee-based program, could potentially generate funding for marketing and infrastructure development. Providing producers with access to structures for segregating and

collectively marketing Wisconsin grass-fed products would foster growth of this sector. A premium for these value-added products would encourage more producers to convert to well-managed, pasture-based systems.

23. Establish explicit standards for “grass-fed.”

Defining what “grass-fed” means will protect the integrity of this emerging market, provide a consistently high quality product and allow grazing farmers to reap the benefits of its popularity.

24. Cooperate to aggregate product. A national market for grass-fed meat and dairy products exists and it will continue to grow in response to consumer demand. BSGP participants said that there is significant interest in working together to foster growth of this market to benefit Wisconsin farmers and to support growth of well-managed grazing in this state.

25. Identify and build on successful marketing. An inventory of existing resources and ongoing efforts is a good first step toward developing a coordinated strategy for growing the grass-fed market in Wisconsin. The grazing community can learn from, support and build on the successes of more than 100 individual direct marketers, the Wisconsin Grass-fed Beef Co-op, other collective marketing efforts and the projects of the DATCP grass-fed market development program.

26. Promote managed grazing as an option that is relevant to any livestock farm. Managed grazing encompasses a set of component practices, many of which are compatible with any existing system of livestock and dairy farming. Outreach to farmers and farm organizations should be framed in ways that downplay a “different and better” stance and approach the discussion in terms of the adaptability of managed grazing to any farming system.

Marketing: *Participant voices*

“Develop a marketing campaign that promotes all benefits, not just one”

“Establish a market—‘The Wisconsin Grazing Brand’—which makes grazing a commonplace type of agriculture to farmers and consumers, like the beef industry with ‘Certified Angus’”

“Create a cookbook, ‘Cooking with Grass’ with an introduction on benefits”

“Start a Facebook page for graziers and consumers, ‘Local Grass-Fed Products from WI Grass’”

“Develop tools and materials to reach out to the non-grazing community”

“Market the grass farmer as part of the product and as an educator and researcher”

“We need to develop more processing, distribution and storage infrastructure to help meet demands in product and consistency”

“Develop a marketing campaign to include TV and documentary film”

Policy

Participants in the BSGP regional listening sessions were keenly aware of a wide range of policies and programs, emanating from all levels of government, that materially affect the managed grazing sector. These policies and programs can facilitate or constrain the success and growth of managed grazing. Generally, participants felt that the policy environment—from local to federal levels—has been shaped principally to meet the needs of major commodity producers, and therefore does not adequately recognize the unique value and special requirements of managed grazing. While participants recognized the importance and utility of influencing policy, there was considerable uncertainty about what policies ought to be targeted, how advocacy activities might be organized and what allies might align with graziers.

BSGP listening session participants identified a wide range of policy-related obstacles and opportunities facing managed grazing in Wisconsin. Of greatest concern was the nature and effect of a plethora of state and federal programs. Most of these comments were framed quite broadly, and ranged across an enormous spectrum of issues. These ranged from broad policy suggestions such as “Change tax structure to encourage grazing” to more specific program changes such as “Perimeter fencing financial assistance thru EQIP.” Throughout the discussions, it appeared that, beyond these rather expansive comments, participants had difficulty clearly specifying the state and/or federal policies that most closely affect grazing, or where priorities for change might lie. Many participants observed that **mechanisms are needed for improved information flows to graziers regarding policy issues**, and that there is inadequate awareness of how to take advantage of—or mitigate the problematic effects of—programs that are already in place.

While BSGP listening session participants had many ideas about what could or should be done in the policy arena, they were also aware that, at present,

they have little capacity for impacting policy. As a farmer at the Arlington session summarized, “Graziers don’t have a voice at the table and don’t know what policies are coming down the road.” In contrast to established agribusiness organizations that regularly lobby at local, state and federal levels, **graziers currently lack an organizational channel for expressing their concerns and advocating for their interests.**

Accomplishing policy goals means that, as one farmer put it, “Graziers need to get involved in politics at the township, county, state and federal levels.” Practically speaking, advocates of managed grazing need to get organized. Although Wisconsin has a large number of local grazing networks, they are highly decentralized, with an orientation toward operational matters rather than policy concerns. Is there an organization that could organize grazing advocates around policy issues? GrassWorks was identified by many participants as the logical organization capable of speaking for the collective interests of the managed grazing community. Historically, GrassWorks has not had a policy function, and while the organization may be able to position itself to play this role, only a minority of graziers are now members of GrassWorks. The organization and its membership would need to make a conscious effort to move into the policy arena.



BSGP participants shared many policy-related ideas, as indicated by DATCP Grazing and Organic Specialist and BSGP Steering Committee member Laura Paine



Making progress in the policy area depends on crafting a compelling story about the social, economic and environmental benefits of managed grazing

Participants also recognized that forming partnerships with other interests would enhance the effectiveness of policy efforts. Cooperation needs to be fostered both within and outside of the farming community. Some participants felt that tensions should be reduced between different types of producers: “For grazing to move forward we don’t want to create distance between grazing and conventional ag, we just need to share our story.” Others observed that it is critical to reach out to interest groups outside of agriculture, especially those that focus on sustainability and conservation. Several of these organizations have established lobbying capabilities and large constituencies. As one participant put it,

“To impact policy, we need to engage potential partners: consumers, hunters, working lands and rural community organizations, Wisconsin River Alliance, Trout Unlimited, Michael Fields. If we engage all of these people, we aren’t a minority any more ... Consumers and grassroots groups are natural allies for fostering policies that will further grazing. We need to work with these allies to present our side of the story.”

Such outreach is best undertaken in a coherent, systematic manner, and this underlines the need for development of an organizational entity to work in this arena.

Building bridges to other organizations and interests requires not only a vehicle for transmission of a message, but an effective message and skilled leadership as well. Prospects for alliances are a function of the degree to which potential allies see the features of managed grazing aligning with their core concerns.

A number of participants commented on the need to publicize the benefits of managed grazing to potential allies and political and public constituencies. **A persuasive, accessible, engaging and accurate story about the social, economic and environmental benefits of managed grazing needs to be crafted and made available.** The data is available, but an effective story is lacking.

Accordingly, the steering committee recommends several initiatives that would provide both an organizational and wide-ranging foundation for development of a significant policy presence for managed grazing.

27. **Clarify the context.** Undertake a study that inventories the full range of local, state and federal policies and regulations that affect managed grazing, and systematically identifies those that most closely support or constrain the effectiveness and expansion of managed grazing. Identify policies that could be modified to encourage adoption of managed grazing.
28. **A voice for graziers.** Critically assess the role and function of organizations that serve the managed grazing community, and work with the community to develop an organization capable of speaking and working on behalf of all graziers.
29. **Specify the benefits.** Compile a summary of the empirically established social, economic and environmental benefits of managed grazing and craft a portfolio of outreach materials capable of effectively educating consumers and decision-makers on managed grazing.
30. **Recruit and cultivate partners.** Identify agencies and organizations working on policy-related activities whose core interests align with those of managed grazing, and systematically work to establish cooperative and mutually supportive relationships with them. Jointly develop effective messages about managed grazing.

Policy: *Participant voices*

“Work to put in place a well-funded regional grazing incentives program in the next farm bill”

“View pastures as cropland in all government programs”

“Way more funding for grass farming at USDA/ARS, Land Grants”

“Work with DATCP, NRCS, DNR, LWCDs to establish new grazing incentives/cost share programs”

“Work to get a grazier on DATCP, DNR and NRCS boards and committees”

“Legislators need to know that grazing is good for the land and environment”

“For years, farmers have been against environmental groups. We need to figure out what we share in common with these groups and bring them on board for grazing.”

“Convince HMOs to offer customer rebates for purchasing grass-fed beef, much like the vegetable CSA rebates spearheaded by MACSAC”