

**A voluntary partnership with private landowners**

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# GLCI News

**Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative**



**Jim and Bonnie Jackson**

## **Wisconsin Is Testament to GLCI Efforts**

*Technical grazing assistance has made a difference to dairy producers across this state.*

**by Kindra Gordon, Spearfish, South Dakota**

Since the early 1980s there's been a quiet revolution occurring in Wisconsin. It's been a movement toward grazing management.

Spurred by tough economic times, many dairy producers in the state have looked toward management intensive grazing (MIG) to decrease costs and increase productivity and profitability for their livestock operations.

Because of the abundance of precipitation and forage, beef producers have recognized the grazing potential and are stepping up efforts for managed grazing systems in Wisconsin as well.

Wisconsin's forage specialists with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, non-profit Resource Conservation and Development Councils (RC&D), and University of Wisconsin Extension have all offered technical and educational assistance through GLCI programs to make the transition to intensive grazing a success within the state. University research has also been conducted and indicates that management intensive rotational grazing is an economically viable alternative for many Wisconsin dairy farmers.

This October, the Wisconsin GLCI Steering Committee and River Country RC&D hosted the fall business meeting for the National GLCI Steering Committee and had the opportunity to showcase their efforts. Tours of Huntsinger Farms, a 750 head cow/calf beef operation, and a dairy farm operated by Jim and Bonnie Jackson near Chippewa Falls were testament to the grazing success being seen in the state.

The Jacksons are a prime example of what many other dairy farms have experienced. Like many, they ran a traditional dairy with 50 Holsteins and have operated the family farm since 1967. All feed was harvested on their farm and fed in confinement. But the high costs and overwhelming labor made them take notice when other dairies began to shift to management intensive grazing.

Then, to celebrate their 25<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary the Jacksons took a trip to Texas and visited several dairy operations along the way – some conventional, others grass-based. By the time they returned home, Jim had made up his mind to switch to management intensive grazing. And he says, "Once I tell my wife I'm going to do something, she holds me to it."

In 1994 they made the switch. They developed 80 acres into improved pasture and also utilized 20 acres of corn

*(Continued on next page)*

### **IN THIS ISSUE**

#### **Wisconsin Is Testament to GLCI Efforts**

Technical grazing assistance has made a difference to dairy producers across this state.

#### **Grassbanks Add Value (And Options)**

The Wyoming Nature Conservancy has set up a ranch as a "grassbank" established to give producers forage alternatives and to promote range-land improvement.

#### **Book Report Amazing Grazing**

A children's book about grazing.

#### **Grazing Events**

From the Deep South, up to Pennsylvania, across to Wyoming and all the way to the Pacific Basin, movement is on toward land management and conservation techniques.

#### **The Chair's Corner**

Nat'l. GLCI Steering Committee Meeting and election information.

#### **Cover photograph**

Jim and Bonnie Jackson of Chippewa Falls, WI, have used management intensive grazing on their dairy farm since 1994.

## Wisconsin Is Testament to GLCI Efforts

(Continued from page 1)

silage and 60 acres of alfalfa. Through cross-fencing and moving cattle daily, the animals now harvest most of their own forage. With the switch, the Jacksons report their lifestyle is more enjoyable, their financial status has improved, and they are running more cattle. They went from a herd of 50 head to a herd of 70.

### How Has Wisconsin Done It?

The success of Wisconsin's grass movement has been bolstered by GLCI, according to many who have been involved. Throughout the state, several educational programs are held, nearly 20 grazing networks have been formed, and "pasture walks" have become popular. All are opportunities for private landowners to learn from specialists as well as each other. Wisconsin has also staffed a state grazing specialist position with NRCS, currently held by Brian Pillsbury, a northern area grazing specialist Rick Zirk, and two grazing specialists are contracted to provide technical assistance to multi-county areas within the state. Currently, Paul Daigle and Mary Anderson fill those roles and have had an impact in the acceptance of grazing practices. Within the areas they provide assistance, grazing plans now account for about 35% of the pastures. Across the state, grazing plans are in place on about 5% of pasture lands.

Grazing efforts within the state have had so much impact that now two technical colleges in Wisconsin have added curriculums for grazing training.

Wisconsin's Secretary of Ag, Jim Harsdorf - himself a dairy farmer - is also a staunch supporter of grazing management and GLCI. He spoke to the GLCI group during their tour and said, "Sustainable isn't enough. I want it to be profitable so if my kids want to be in ag, they can."

He added, "I regularly visit with producers who say grazing has changed their operation. Rotational grazing as a management system is turning operations around. Management intensive grazing may not be for everyone, but for those it keeps on the land, our state and country will be better for it."

That said, Harsdorf believes that grazing management has an important role in the future of Wisconsin's economy. "Agriculture is a \$40 billion industry in Wisconsin, with one out of five people employed in ag. It's an incredible foundation for our economy. We've got to work with our dairy producers to help them be profitable, and I believe grazing systems will have a role in that. We've got the precipitation and are able to produce the forage to be a strong livestock state."

For Joe Tomandl, a dairy grazer and the current chairperson of Wisconsin's GLCI Steering Committee, the success of GLCI has been a personal one. He says, "GLCI has benefited our state and dairy producers. I'm so proud they are so passionate about grazing. For me, it's made a great impact because through grazing we've been able to produce another farmer - my son."

Even with their successes, Wisconsin still has more work to be done. There are three and a half million pasture acres in Wisconsin, mostly cool season species, and only a quarter million of those acres are in grazing systems, reports Dennis Cosgrove, a forage Extension specialist with UW-River Falls. "We've got a lot of work to do yet," he says.

Still, Wisconsin has shown that technical assistance makes a difference. "I'm envious of the program here in Wisconsin," Texan Chip Merrill told his fellow national GLCI Steering Committee members after the fall meeting and tour. "This is just an example of what we could do if GLCI had funding for technical assistance to private landowners."

## Grassbank Adds Value (and Options)

In a drought year like this, most producers wish they had some extra forage in the bank. For some Wyoming producers that concept is actually an option.

The Heart Mountain Ranch near Cody and Powell, Wyoming has been set up as a "grassbank" by the Wyoming Nature Conservancy, the organization that owns the ranch. The "grassbank" was established to give producers forage alternatives and promote long-term improvement on rangelands.

Here's how it works: Livestock producers can apply for summer grazing permits on the "grassbank" for a fee that is about half the cost of what grazing fees would be on private lands. As part of the swap, the land that they would have traditionally run their livestock on is then involved in some form of restoration - such as a prescribed burn or grazing deferment to allow vegetation to regrow for winter wildlife grazing.

"It's an opportunity to exchange values for values," says Dennis Sun, a Coordinated Resource Management consultant with the Wyoming Department of Ag. Sun also works with GLCI efforts throughout Wyoming. He explains that livestock forage values can be exchanged for a desired resource outcome on land that is under restoration while the cattle graze the grassbank.

For example, in 2002, the Heart Mountain Ranch Grassbank provided 1,700 AUMs of forage to three area ranch families. In turn, two restoration projects on their lands were implemented. They included rest from grazing on Sheep Mountain's critical elk winter range and rest from grazing on the Bald Ridge Forest Allotment for a fuel reduction burn by the Forest Service.

Of the unique grassbank project, Sun says the group has two objectives: first, to sustain the diversity of the Wyoming ranges and forests and second, to keep ranchers on the land and ranchland habitats intact. "We really believe this grassbank will enable improvement of lands for livestock, wildlife and sensitive species," Sun says.

And it appears to be working. Wyoming rancher Bernie Bjornestad says he would have had to reduce the size of his herd or sell out had he not had the chance to utilize the grassbank.

While this is the first grassbank established in Wyoming, Sun hopes this innovative example will foster more cooperation and solution-oriented approaches to future resource issues.

An advisory group has been established along with a selection committee to assist with planning the management of the grassbank. This group has developed goals, operating principles, selection criteria and monitoring guidelines.

For more information about this program, contact Laura Bell, director of the Wyoming Nature Conservancy Absarokas program at 307-587-1655.

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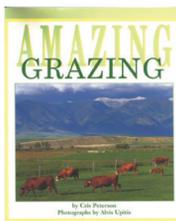
## Grazing Management Is Theme for New Children's Book

A new book, titled *Amazing Grazing*, has been published to help school children and the general public learn more about the positive aspects of grazing management.

The book spotlights three Montana ranchers – Bob Lee, Ray Marxer and Tom Milesnick – all of whom have been recognized by the beef industry for their devotion to environmental stewardship. The book includes colorful pictures of cattle grazing on these producers' ranches and easy-to-understand text that explains their grazing management practices throughout the year.

The Montana Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI) Committee has developed lesson plans about grazing management to complement the book. The Montana GLCI has purchased over 100 books and will provide them along with the lesson plans to teachers at 124 schools in Montana for use in their curriculums.

The book sells for \$16.95. To order your copy, visit the book publisher's web site, [www.boydsmillspress.com](http://www.boydsmillspress.com).



servicing eight northwest Louisiana parishes (counties)-- organized a four-day tour from Louisiana to Oklahoma, Kansas and Texas.

They've hosted the tour the last four years and have had a great response. Tour stops include Oklahoma National Stockyards and Auction, Wheeler Brothers Feed Yard, Jarvis Ranch, Red Buffalo Ranch, Mormon Ranch, Fields Ranch, Leland Tucker Ranch and Priefert Ranch Equipment Manufacturers. There were 23 sponsors, including GLCI, Louisiana Beef Industry Council, Farm Bureau, local soil and water conservation districts, and local businesses such as banks and tractor suppliers, which made the tour affordable for small-scale producers. For more information contact Twin Valley RC&D Area Coordinator Benny Dobson at 318-352-4946 or [benny.dobson@la.usda.gov](mailto:benny.dobson@la.usda.gov).

## PROJECT GRASS UNDER WAY IN PA



The Pennsylvania grazing partnership effort, **Project Grass**, held its first statewide grazing conference on November 19 & 20, 2002.

The partnership is comprised of producers and local, state, federal, private and non-profit entities with an interest in improving the economic viability and environmental quality of livestock operations through promotion of grazing. Over 100 people participated in the event and worked to establish objectives and action plans to increase grazing opportunities to producers in the region in the future. Four primary focus areas that were identified included 1) marketing and production, 2) research needs, 3) partner development and funding, and 4) public relations and education.

## GRAZING EVENTS

### WISCONSIN GOES GREEN



"Grazing Towards a Greener Tomorrow" is the theme – and the goal – of the 2003 Wisconsin Grazing Conference to be held Feb. 16-18 in Stevens Point, WI.

Utah State University range scientist Fred Provenza will be the keynote speaker for the event and will discuss how livestock diet preferences are shaped from the womb through social facilitation.

Other speakers will include Larry Shearer, who will share tips for "Making Seasonal Dairy Grazing Work," Ben Bartlett will address low-stress livestock handling; and, Greg Judy says, "No money, No land, No problem!" You can still run a profitable grazing operation by finding low-cost (even free) land leases, custom grazing cattle, and keeping a positive attitude.

For more information about the three-day conference, contact Paul Nehring, Exec. Secretary, GrassWorks, Inc. at 715-261-6009.

### PACIFIC BASIN COMMITTED TO GRAZING MANAGEMENT

GLCI efforts are even stretching to the Pacific Basin. In 2002, GLCI funds were used to supplement the funding of the Soil Conservationist position located on Rota in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). The current Soil Conservationist has a degree in rangeland management and is the primary contact for grazing issues in the CNMI and Guam.

Work is also continuing to gather information for Ecological Site Descriptions in the Pacific Basin Area. Several sites continued in their second year of "clipping" of pasture vegetation to determine productivity. This is a year-round task, given the tropical climate of the area.

An on-farm demonstration and staff training on the use of electric fencing for establishment of grazing paddocks for caribou (water buffalo) was provided as well in 2002 for the Guam Field Office. Several pastures were established as "wallows," a central point for pastures (required by caribou). "Training" behavior of the caribou was observed as animals learned the effects of electric fencing. Caribou are traditionally docile animals when domesticated; however, they have little respect for traditional fencing.



### CAJUNS VISIT KS, TX, OK

The best way to learn about something is to see it for yourself. So, to teach Louisiana livestock producers about intensive grazing land management, rotational grazing, basic forage management and production, and confined feedlot operations from start to finish, the Twin Valley RC&D--

## Final Rule For CPGL Announced

The 2002 Farm Bill authorized the USDA to provide technical assistance from the Natural Resources Conservation Service to owners and managers of private grazing land through the Conservation of Private Grazing Land (CPGL) program. The final rule for the program was published in the Federal Register on Nov. 12.

Through CPGL, NRCS conservationists will be better able to assist individuals in understanding the basic ecological principles associated with managing their land and implementing conservation management plans that address the needs of soil, water, air, plants and animals.

"This rule builds our capacity to provide technical assistance to those who own and operate private grazing land," said NRCS Chief Bruce Knight. "This is a voluntary program that addresses natural resource concerns on private grazing land while enhancing the economic and social stability of grazing land enterprises and the rural communities that depend on them," he adds.

Although financial assistance is not available through CPGL, other federal, state and local programs may be available to provide cost-share funds.

The 2002 Farm Bill represents an unprecedented investment in conservation on America's private lands, nearly \$17 billion over the next six years. More information on the final rule for the CPGL program is available at: [http://www.access.gpo.gov/su\\_docs/aces/fr-cont.html](http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/aces/fr-cont.html)

# THE CHAIR'S CORNER

The National GLCI Steering Committee held their fall business meeting in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, October 25 & 26. This was an excellent meeting with over 100 participants attending the tour on Friday and 16 steering committee members and 28 guests attending the business meeting on Saturday. (See highlights within this newsletter).

The committee discussed the final rule for Conservation of Private Grazing Lands (CPGL) at the Eau Claire meeting. Chip Merrill, representing the Soil and Water Conservation Society, presented a funding proposal for CPGL. This proposal calls for supporting full funding of \$60 million for CPGL over a three-year-period. This proposal was unanimously passed by resolution by the National GLCI Steering committee.

The final rule for the Conservation of Private Grazing Land was published in the Federal Register November 12. This is good news for the National GLCI Steering Committee that has supported this rule since the 1996 Farm Bill.

Keith Bartholomay, Sheldon, North Dakota, was selected by Society for Range Management to replace Pete Jackson as one of their representatives to National GLCI Steering Committee. Another leadership change is that Gerald Jaeger from Wisconsin is now the voting member for National Farmer's Union on the Steering Committee. He replaces Minnesotan Eunice Biel, who asked to serve as the alternate. We thank Eunice for her years of work and dedication to GLCI.

Officer elections were also held during the fall business meeting. Flavius Barker and I were re-elected to our positions of vice chair and chair, respectively. Rooter Brite was elected to the position of Treasurer.

Next fall's annual business meeting will be held September 4-6, 2003 in Rapid City, South Dakota.

**Bob Drake, Chairman**

*National GLCI Steering Committee*



## Spread the Word About 2NCGL

**Brochures and posters promoting the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual National Conference on Grazing Lands are now available. If you would like to help distribute these within your state, contact Monti Golla to request the materials. Email her at [Grazinglands@cox-internet.com](mailto:Grazinglands@cox-internet.com).**

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