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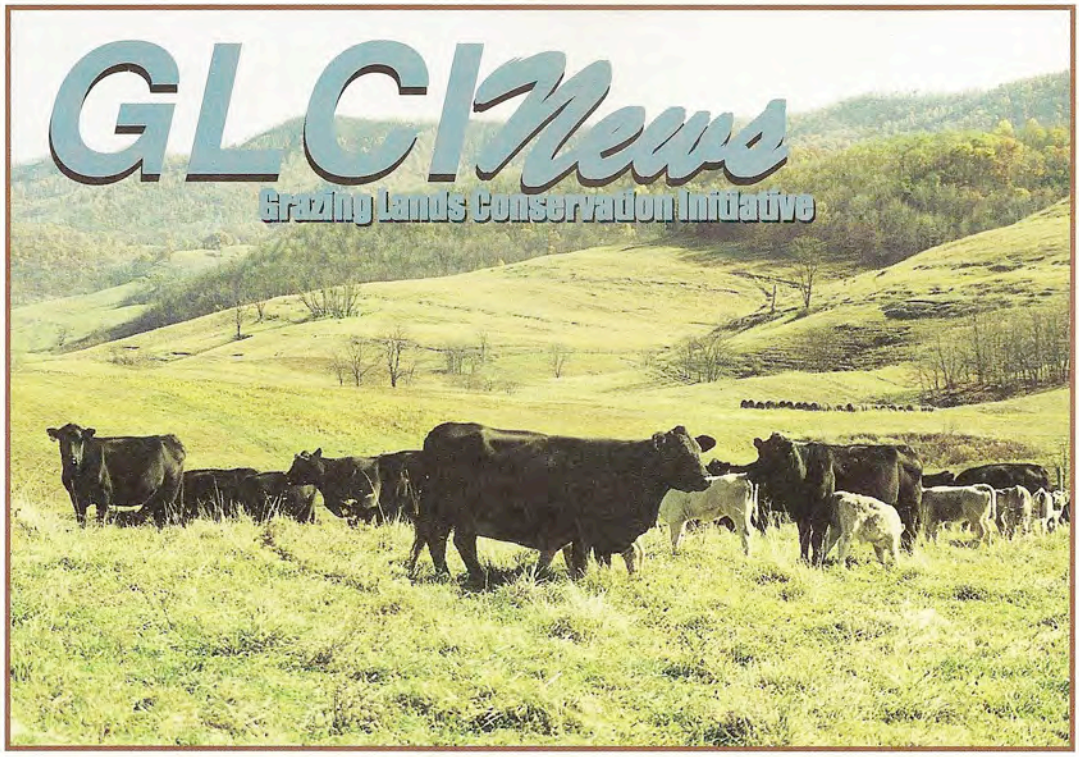
GLCI News

Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative



A voluntary partnership with private landowners

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Cover photograph: Cattle on Charlie Clark's farm in Rich Valley, VA winter graze on an excellent tall grass stand. Thanks to his forage management practices, he has cut his winter feeding costs and time input by more than 50 percent.

Time & Money

Making Grazing Lands More Profitable

by Mike Altizer, NRCS, Abingdon, VA and Sam Linkenhoker, NRCS, Blacksburg, VA

"How do I make my grazing lands more profitable?" That was the question Charlie Clark of Rich Valley, Virginia was trying to answer. He runs a beef operation on 3,500 acres in southwest Virginia. Some of these lands have been in the family for years while others are rented. Traditionally, the operation consisted of 150 acres of corn, 350 acres of hayland, and 3,000 acres of pastureland. The grazing lands were in large pastures of rolling bottomlands to steep mountainsides. Like many acres of grazing lands across the southeast, his pastures were overlooked and underutilized for the most part.

When Charlie heard about the efforts of the Soil and Water Conservation Districts, the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), and their partners in the Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative, he became interested. He contacted Grazing Lands Specialist Mike Altizer, coordinator of the Middle Fork of Holston River/New River Watershed Controlled Grazing Project. This special project of the New River Highlands RC&D was established to help graziers install best management conservation practices and improve their grazing management. These grazing operations serve as demonstration farms for others to visit.

(Continued on next page)

Due to his successful experiences, Charlie Clark has become a disciple of management-intensive grazing, and he takes advantage of every opportunity to learn more about the art of grazing management by attending seminars and other educational activities.

Making Grazing Lands More Profitable

(Continued)

The technical assistance provided by Altizer on that first visit convinced Charlie that he had discovered what he had been looking for. He found a source of information that was going to enable him to increase returns from his operation while still protecting his natural resources. Charlie decided he would test the effectiveness of Mike's suggestions on one of his farms prior to jumping in and attempting to implement the practices and techniques on his entire operation.

Clark developed a grazing management plan for his 165-acre Meadowview farm with Mike's assistance. This unit consisted of 80 acres of cropland and 85 acres of grazing land, which was all in one large pasture. Charlie said, "I'm willing to spend the time and money if I can increase my grazing capacity and keep the cattle out of Cedar Creek."

His plan called for the development of a new water system including development of a spring, installation of 4,400 feet of pipeline, and three watering troughs. He also built nearly 12,000 feet of fence. Installing these practices allowed him to convert cropland to pastureland and establish 17 grazing paddocks rather than one large pasture. That enabled him to utilize his forage more efficiently.

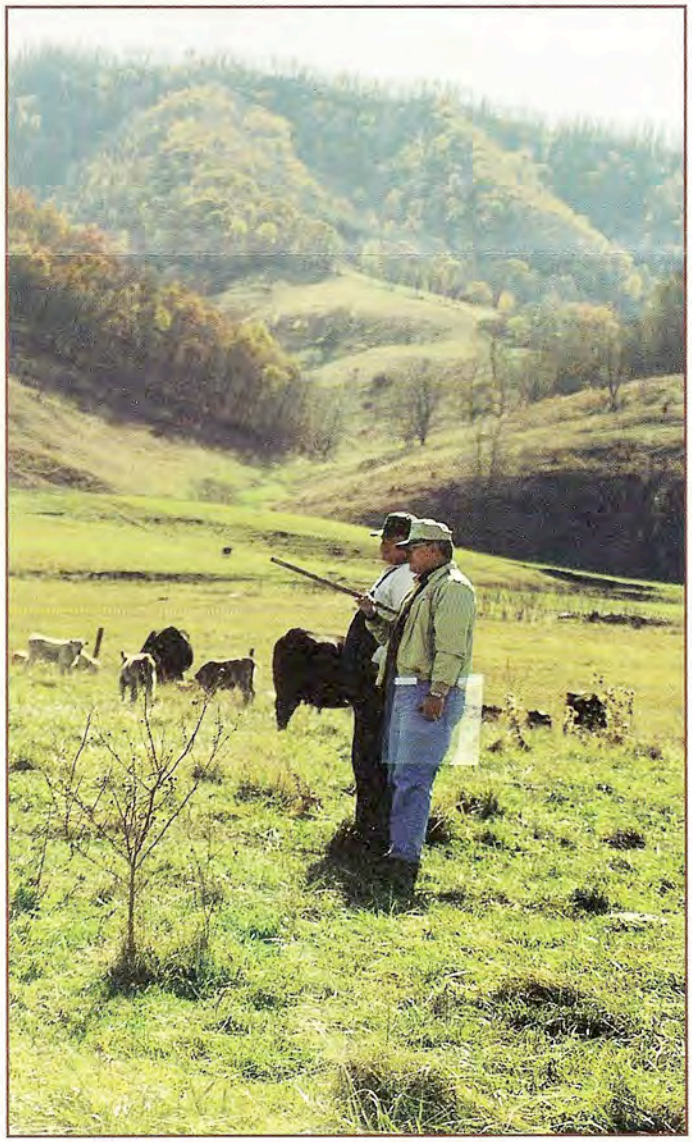
Clark started out cautiously, because building fences and installing watering systems isn't easy or cheap. But, he saw benefits almost immediately, and he hasn't slowed down since. He has developed management plans on his three other farms and is implementing those plans. He has established new water sources, installed 22,000 feet of new pipeline, and he and his farm crew have completed more than 23 miles of new fence so far.

Charlie initially divided his grazing lands into larger pastures, but he installed the first fences and water in such a manner that he could divide them again into smaller units if he wanted to. He uses polywire for temporary fencing to create smaller paddocks as needed.

Prior to Mike's visit Charlie had 150 acres of corn and 350 acres of hayland which were all used to produce feed for his cattle. These were costly and time-consuming operations. He has since sold two of his tractors and all of his corn planting and harvesting equipment. In Charlie's words, "that's money back in my pocket and time for other activities."

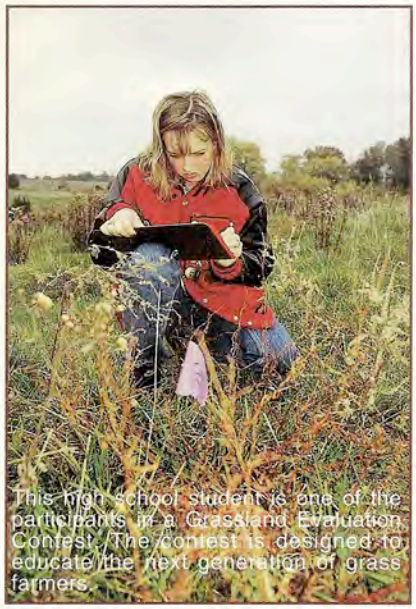
Clark's new grazing management operation has allowed him to quit growing corn, reduce his need for leased land, increase his spare time, and do a better job of conserving his natural resources. Bottom line…he's producing more pounds of beef on fewer acres, at less cost, and with less effort than before. As an added bonus, his natural resources are improving and will be in better shape when his son takes over. **That's what the Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative is all about.**

Charlie Clark and Grazing Lands Specialist Mike Altizer evaluate stockpiled forage on Charlie's Rich Valley farm in Smyth County, VA.



Educating Grass Farmers of Tomorrow

Submitted by Mark Kennedy, NRCS, Houston, MO



This high school student is one of the participants in a Grassland Evaluation Contest. The contest is designed to educate the next generation of grass farmers.

Missouri has a significant livestock industry that is largely supported by grassland. It ranks second in the U. S. in the number of beef cattle, thirteenth in the number of milk cows, third in the number of all cattle and calves and second in hay production (excluding alfalfa). Livestock and related products account for 50% of the state's agricultural receipts. Grassland agriculture fits well with the state's climate and soil resources.

Not only are grasslands important to Missouri's livestock industry, but they also improve the environmental quality and aesthetic beauty of the state. They provide ground cover to prevent soil erosion, provide wildlife habitat, and filter pollutants from water. Because of the importance of grassland, present and future landowners need to understand the wise use and management of this valuable resource as they try to improve livestock production, wildlife habitat, and environmental quality. By doing this, Missouri grasslands can be fully utilized and sustainable while contributing to the agricultural economy and the natural beauty of the landscape.

In an effort to educate the next generation about grassland management, the Natural Resources Conservation Service in Missouri, along with the Missouri Department of Conservation and the University of Missouri Extension, developed a Grassland Evaluation Contest for high school students. The first contests were held in 1991 in two locations with ten teams participating. Since that time, it has grown rapidly in popularity. There are now regional contests held in each of the six Vo-Ag regions in the state. At the six district contests in 1998, 59 teams and 320 students competed for individual and team awards. The top two teams from each region advance to compete in the state contest.

In the 1998 contest, the team from Stockton, Missouri was the high scoring team with a total of 1031 points out of a possible 1200. This team will advance to the National Range and Pasture Judging Contest in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma in May 1999. Jim Phillips from Stockton was the highest scoring individual with 361 points out of 400. Second high scoring individual was Chris Newman from Stockton with 349 points and third was Jana Duff from Buffalo with 340 points. The high scoring individual is sponsored by the Southern Section Society of Range Management to attend the SRM annual meeting and participate in the Youth Forum.

The contest is divided into 4 sections including wildlife habitat, plant identification, soils interpretation, and grassland condition. In the wildlife habitat section, contestants evaluate wildlife habitat to determine food and cover availability for bobwhite quail. In the plant identification section, students have to identify 20 plants that include grasses, legumes, forbs and woody vegetation. In the soils interpretation section, students locate a 50 x 50-foot plot laid out in the field on a soils map, and use soil survey information to complete their score sheet. In the grassland condition section, students appraise the existing conditions in the 50 x 50-foot grassland plot. They are also given a scenario with forage production, livestock numbers and producer goals. By calculating livestock intake and comparing to seasonal forage production, students have to determine whether forage supply is adequate to meet the seasonal livestock needs. They also have to determine what changes, if any, need to be made in forage and/or livestock management.

It takes a lot of dedicated people to put these contests together and make them run smoothly. At the regional level, committees made up of NRCS, MDC, MU Extension, SWCD personnel and Vo-Ag instructors set up, conduct and score the contests. Each region is also represented on the state contest committee. These contests are supported by the Missouri GLCI Coalition and are financially supported by the Missouri Cattleman's Association, the Missouri Forage and Grassland Council, individual Soil and Water Conservation Districts and the Missouri Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

The State Grassland Evaluation Contest Committee has worked closely with the University of Missouri Instructional Materials Laboratory over the past few years to develop a classroom curriculum around the contest. The curriculum became available for Vo-Ag instructors to use as teaching material in classes in the spring of 1998. This has proven to be an asset for the instructors as well as for the growth of the contest. Many teachers who have participated have said this is the most practical contest they are involved in and is something that students can use now and in the future.

The committee would like to see the contest expanded even further. They envision a multi-state contest for those states whose primary grassland is tame pasture. Several states have requested information on how the Missouri contest is set up and show interest in setting up similar contests in their states. To help with this effort, the Missouri committee would be willing to host a training session for agency personnel and Vo-ag instructors sometime during the summer of 1999. Once other states are having similar contests then a regional contest would be possible. If you are interested in this training event or for more information, contact Mark Kennedy at (417) 967-2028 ext.5 or e-mail to mark@mohouston.fsc.usda.gov.

Logo Contest

The National GLCI Steering Committee is conducting a national contest to select a new design for the GLCI logo.

The winner will receive:

Trip for 2 to the National Grazing Lands Conference

Trip includes:

- round-trip airfare
- three nights' lodging at Bally's Hotel and Casino
- complimentary registration for the conference

Entries must be received no later than July 1, 1999.
The winner will be selected by September 1, 1999.

Mail entries to:

Gary Westmoreland, National GLCI Coordinator
101 S. Main St.
Temple, TX 76501-7682

Buffalo are an important part of the overall operation on the Perfect 10 Ranch near Rose, Nebraska. The ranch is owned and operated by Dave Hutchinson. The ranch was toured by the Nebraska Grazing Land Coalition on the second day of their summer meeting in July.

NOTICE ! ! !

Due to unavoidable circumstances, **The National Conference on Grazing Lands** has been **RESCHEDULED** to the first week of **December, 2000.** The conference will still be held at **Bally's Hotel in Las Vegas, NV.**

GLCI News

Contact these affiliated organizations:

American Farm Bureau Federation
Herb Manig
(847) 685-8785

American Forage and Grassland Council
Dana Tucker
1-800-944-2342

American Sheep Industry
Tom McDonnell
(303) 771-3500

Dairy Industry
John Roberts
(802) 462-2252

National Association of Conservation Districts
Robert Toole
(405) 359-9011

National Cattlemen's Beef Association
John Pemberton
(202) 347-0228

Society for Range Management
Craig Whittekiend
(303) 355-7070

Soil and Water Conservation Society
Craig Cox
(515) 289-2331, ext. 13

Visit the GLCI homepage at http://www.glci.org