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## A voluntary partnership with private landowners

### IN THIS ISSUE:

#### New Drought Tool

A website has been created to help ranchers prepare for and manage drought risk.

#### Cow Chow Game

This interactive game and video helps consumers learn more about the beef industry.

#### State Spotlight: Montana

Celebrating 20 years and much success!

#### Mark Your Calendar

5NCGL is Dec. 9-12 in Florida.

#### Top Steward Award

Pennsylvania farm earns special honor.

# GLCI News



## Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative

### Managing Drought Risk on the Ranch

*New website helps ranchers plan and prepare.*

*By Kindra Gordon*

Landowners know that drought is a normal part of the climate. And seasoned ranchers also know that the best way to manage drought is to plan and prepare for it before it occurs. A new website has been developed to help landowners do just that – plan, prepare for and manage drought.

The site – available at [www.drought.unl.edu/ranchplan](http://www.drought.unl.edu/ranchplan) – was launched during the summer of 2011 by the National Drought Mitigation Center (NDMC) at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Tonya Haigh, a rural sociologist with the NDMC, says the Center's mission is to help lessen drought impacts on society. She explains that the U.S. Drought Monitor map and the Drought Impact Reporter – a site that archives drought-related news and individual producer reports – are both tools already offered by NDMC. Now, the new website adds another facet to help ranchers create a written plan of their specific strategies to manage drought.

Created with input from real ranchers, the *Managing Drought Risk on the Ranch* website was created with the aim of educating ranchers about drought and providing a format to develop their own individual ranch plan – with strategies before, during and after drought.

Funding for the website was provided from the USDA Risk Management Agency with collaborators from the NDMC, South Dakota State University, University of Nebraska-Lincoln and Texas A&M-Kingsville.

Materials on the site are generally applicable to the Great Plains region – from Texas to North Dakota. Sections on the site include information about:

- Drought basics
- Inventory and monitoring
- Strategies to consider before drought
- Strategies to consider during drought
- Strategies to consider after drought
- Writing a drought plan

Haigh notes that the "Write a Plan" section on the website includes seven specific steps to assist ranchers with the process. These include forming a planning team that also considers conservation and financial expertise. Additionally, the vision and strategic objectives of the ranch

*(continued on page 2)*

# Managing Drought

(continued from page 1)

must be considered as the drought plan is developed.

Sample drought plans from eight Great Plains ranching operations are also included in the “Write a Plan” section on the site. Haigh says, “I think the lessons shared in these real life examples are one of the most helpful parts of the website.”

Haigh notes that these eight case studies share their critical dates and the target conditions they monitor during the year. Haigh says each landowner stresses how important it has been to have such dates. “A common recommendation that kept coming up from landowners and drought advisors as we put together this website, was that the earlier producers make decisions and adjust stocking rates during drought, the better.”

## Lessons Learned

One of the featured case studies on the Managing Drought website is Welch Ranch from Southern Colorado. Of their lessons learned, they share: “You cannot drought proof a ranch. You can help and you can delay the effects and you can minimize them, but you can’t drought proof your ranch.”

Haigh concurs. She notes that severe drought can undermine anyone’s plans and the choices rangeland managers must make can be difficult.



But she adds, “The landowners we’ve surveyed emphasize that the planning you do early is definitely beneficial. This website is focused on defining drought options before the drought happens.” She adds, “Then if your monitoring indicates a drought situation, the plan is there and the stress and uncertainty has less of an impact on your decision.”

*Editor's Note: Access the Managing Drought Risk on the Ranch website at [www.drought.unl.edu/ranchplan](http://www.drought.unl.edu/ranchplan). The U.S. Drought Monitor map is available at [www.droughtmonitor.unl.edu](http://www.droughtmonitor.unl.edu) and the Drought Impact Reporter is available at [www.droughtreporter.unl.edu](http://www.droughtreporter.unl.edu).*

## What Do Ranchers Do To Prepare For Drought?

Rural sociologist Tonya Haigh acknowledges that every ranch is unique and different. But through research conducted by the National Drought Mitigation Center she says there are some commonalities among ranchers who have been successful at mitigating the effects of drought on their ranch. What are their strategies? Haigh shares this list:

- They know how much forage they are capable of producing, how much rainfall it takes to produce that forage, and what their forage demand is throughout the year.
- They build flexibility into their system.
- They manage to improve the health of their rangeland resources.
- They track rainfall and monitor their forage production.
- They know when in the year they have to make decisions about stocking rates, and they stick to those dates.
- They know what they are going to do if their precipitation or forage levels tell them that they need to adjust the stocking rate.
- They think about the long-term health of their resources and the long-term financial management of their operations.

## Beef Industry Launches Cow Chow Game & Videos

The beef industry has launched an online game and video series called “Cow Chow” that allows curious consumers to explore what cattle really eat from birth to the feedyard. The 10-question game and corresponding videos give consumers a glimpse into the life of a real cow.

The interactive web game was recently launched by the beef checkoff and is hosted on the checkoff’s ExploreBeef.org website where consumers can also learn more about beef safety, environmental stewardship, animal care and beef nutrition. The videos are also available on the Explore Beef YouTube channel.

For creation of the “Cow Chow” videos, cattle in Kansas, South Dakota, Texas and Florida wore specially-rigged GoPro cameras to share this important animal care story from the cows’ eye view.

Consumers can see exactly what cattle really eat every day as they compete in the interactive quiz game. Upon completion of the game, users can post results and badge to their Facebook page, and challenge their friends to beat their best score. The Cow Chow game and videos emphasize the attention cattle farmers and ranchers pay to their animals, their land and their communities.



# STATE SPOTLIGHT – MONTANA GLCI CELEBRATES 20 YEARS



The Montana Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI) celebrates 20 years as an organization in 2012. The steering committee was formed in 1992; one year after the National GLCI was formed and continues to serve the farmers and ranchers in Montana. Plans for a celebration to mark the 20 year anniversary are still in the making.

The mission statement of the Montana GLCI is: “Strengthening partnerships and encouraging diversification to maintain or improve private grazing lands through grassroots efforts and interagency technical assistance.” With strong partnerships between the Montana Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and Montana State University (MSU) Extension, the Montana GLCI is looking forward to a bright future and another 20 years!

Over the years, Montana GLCI has sponsored around 100 projects across the state. In 2011, the steering committee sponsored seven projects, four of which were educational workshops and seminars, (Montana Range Days, Judith Basin Range School, “Continuing the Montana Legacy of the Family Ranch,” rancher resource workshop in Winnett and the Teton Weed and Ranch Tour). The three demonstration projects include:

- how mob-grazing affects soil carbon levels and soil food web activity over time;
- Cameron Bench Grazing Land Renovation Trial; and
- a project which focuses on a renovation of an existing site, on approximately nine acres, featuring nine forage varieties.

The Montana GLCI continues to support landowners across Montana using a proactive approach to address areas of concern on their ranches and supports local seminars and workshops. For more information about the demonstration projects check out the website at [www.mtgleci.org](http://www.mtgleci.org).

Starting in November of 2011, Carla Lawrence, co-coordinator for the Montana GLCI, started a monthly newsletter which features members of the steering committee, ex-official members and partner organizations, as well informational and calendar events which relate to grazing lands.

The educational and awareness campaign “Cowboy up with Conservation – It can save your grass” was rolled out in December of 2003 and continues to provide educational materials to interested individuals. In addition to the conservation packets, the Montana GLCI purchases radio ads through the Northern Ag Broadcasting to market GLCI. For more information or to order a packet; check out the website!

The Montana GLCI continues to work on an electronic version of a grazing record keeping system, and continues to sell the hard copy version of the grazing record keeping binder for \$20. Anyone interested in purchasing the hard copy may contact Jon Siddoway at (406) 587-6970 or email [jon.siddoway@mt.usda.gov](mailto:jon.siddoway@mt.usda.gov) or Carla Lawrence at (406) 962-3371 or email [carla.at.the.ranch@gmail.com](mailto:carla.at.the.ranch@gmail.com).

As we celebrate 20 years, the Montana GLCI looks forward to seeing all our fellow GLCI members from across the nation this coming December when we meet in Florida for the Fifth National Conference on Grazing Lands.

- Submitted by Carla Lawrence



## Plan Now for the 5th National Grazing Conference

**Dec. 9-12, 2012 in Orlando, FL**

“Grazinglands, a Magical Environment” is the theme that has been chosen for the 5th National Grazing Conference to be held Dec. 9-12 in Orlando, FL. The conference is being hosted by the Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI) and a number of sponsoring organizations.

Through oral presentations, poster papers and a trade show, the event features successful cutting edge management technologies for grazing practices, optimizing grazing land health for environmental and social benefits and a variety of other topics related to livestock grazing and management.

The call for papers has been released and is available at [www.glcic.org](http://www.glcic.org) and then clicking on Grazing Conference. Abstracts are due by May 1, 2012.

If you have any questions regarding the conference or abstracts, please contact John W. Peterson, 5NCGL Conference Manager, at 703-505-1782, or [jwpeterson@cox.net](mailto:jwpeterson@cox.net).

# Pennsylvania Farm Wins NCBA Environmental Stewardship Award

The Masonic Village Farm, near Elizabethtown, Pa., was recognized as the national winner of the National Cattlemen's Foundation Environmental Stewardship Award during the 2012 Cattle Industry Convention and NCBA Trade Show in Nashville, Tenn. on Feb. 2.

The Masonic Village, a not-for-profit continuing care retirement community owned and operated by the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania, has partnered with federal and state agencies as well as private agricultural organizations to manage natural resources.

The Masonic Village Farm, which has been in operation for more than 100 years, raises 180 cow/calf pairs, maintains a feedlot that finishes approximately 200 steers annually, grows corn, soybeans and hay land. The Village implements rotational grazing to maintain its pastures; uses manure from feedlots to fertilize its fields; and innovative watering systems throughout the farm. Additionally, the farm invites the public to tour the facilities and learn more about the possibilities of stewardship in agriculture.

"For America's cattlemen and women, conservation and environmental stewardship is a must. At the Masonic Village Farm, they have raised the bar by partnering with local, state and federal governmental and private organizations to implement innovative practices and technologies that will leave the land and its resources better for future generations of beef producers," said NCBA Chief Executive Officer Forrest Roberts. "As the entire industry works to continually improve our environmental sustainability, the Masonic Village Farm is a shining example that we should all strive to achieve. It is an honor to recognize the leaders at the Masonic Village for their willingness to go the extra mile in the name of environmental stewardship."

The Environmental Stewardship Award Program (ESAP), now in its 21st year, was created to recognize beef producers who make environmental stewardship a priority on their farms and ranches while they also improve production and profitability. The ESAP award is sponsored by Dow AgroSciences; the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS); U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; NCBA; and the National Cattlemen's Foundation.

The Masonic Village was nominated by the Pennsylvania NRCS and was recognized during the 2011 Cattle Industry Summer Conference as one of six regional ESAP winners.

The other regional winners included: Daigle Farms, Ragley, Louisiana; Matador Ranch, Matador Texas; M/M Feedlot, Parma Idaho; Della Ranches and the Tanner Family of Grouse Creek, Grouse Creek, Utah; and Center of the Nation Cattle Company, Newell, South Dakota.

Nominations are currently open for the 2012 Environmental Stewardship Award Program. Visit <http://www.environmentalstewardship.org/> for nomination materials. Deadline is March 2.

To have your GLCI activities or upcoming events highlighted in this newsletter, contact Kindra Gordon at phone 605-722-7699 or kindras@gordonresources.com.

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Contact these affiliated organizations: