

A voluntary
partnership with
private
landowners



Cattle, Trees and Wildlife - A Winning Combination

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Cover photograph:

Leo Hollinger (left) explains his silvopasture operation to visitors during a recent tour of his place.

Leo Hollinger is a cattleman, a tree farmer, a sportsman, a conservationist and a gardener. He is also an innovator who likes to explore different ways to do things on his Wilcox County, Alabama farm. Recently a group of agroforestry and silviculture experts from USDA converged on the Hollinger farm to see exactly what Leo is doing and to learn the secrets of his success. By the time the tour ended, everyone was impressed with this soft-spoken southern gentleman and the way he operates his farm.

Leo was one of the first cattlemen in Alabama to integrate trees with pasture and livestock... a practice known as silvopasture. Silvopasture provides multiple benefits to landowners if managed properly. Sid Brantly (NRCS Regional Grazingland Coordinator), and Raleigh Wilkerson (ALFA Director for Beef, Sheep, Goat and Ratites) have worked with Hollinger to help him get his silvopasture operation up and running. They all visited Louisiana State University's Hill Farm Research Station near Homer, Louisiana to get a firsthand look at the research being done by Dr. Terry Clason and other scientists. They saw how agroforestry could be profitable and could enhance aesthetics and property value.

"When we returned," Hollinger explains, "I planted 40 acres of pine seedlings in our pastures. Next year I will plant twenty-five or thirty acres more, and I will continue to plant until all my open land is in pines. We plant loblolly pines, which were developed by a local paper company to fit our particular site. Once we get into production and the trees are marketable, we expect a good cash flow because we will have trees ready to thin or harvest every year or two depending on growing conditions and the markets. With wide

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spacing and good fertilization, we expect faster growth than what we would get on a regular plantation. The trees will be shorter than in a traditional pine plantation, but they will be fatter," according to Mr. Hollinger.

His trees are planted in rows 32 feet apart with six-foot spacing within the rows. The research work at LSU was done on 16-foot spacing which is ideal to take advantage of self-pruning. Once you go beyond 16-foot spacing there is no shading effect and some kind of pruning is necessary. Weighing the increased need for pruning versus the more favorable conditions for cattle production and the capability of his equipment, Hollinger chose 32-foot row spacing. According to Hollinger, "The 32-foot spacing will favor cattle production a little bit more than tree production. Ideally, to take advantage of self-pruning, a 16' by 16' spacing may be the best way to go. But since it didn't fit my equipment, I opted for the 32-foot spacing."

Since initial tree spacing is not particularly critical to Leo, in three or four years he plans to remove or inject inferior trees. Then he will carefully observe his trees to see how they respond and will do whatever he believes will best meet his goals. He will maintain at least a 30% crown to stem ratio for proper tree growth.

"Our pastures are predominantly common bermudagrass and Tifton 9 bahiagrass with a lot of volunteer rye grass and crimson clover," Hollinger continued. "We will graze our pastures until the end of February, then plant trees, then cut some hay from it, and hope that the clover will reseed to continue the process." Hollinger is convinced that having trees in his pasture is

Pine seedlings are growing well in pastures of bahiagrass, volunteer rye, and crimson clover.



Beef production is just one of the goals on Leo and Jeannie Hollinger's multiple enterprise farm.

much better than open pasture for what he wants to do. "It is going to be real pretty out here in 10, or 15, or 20 years. It will look like a park," he explains.

Conservationist Leo Hollinger explains, "To my way of thinking, these wide row spaced pine trees with the grass between them will be better for wildlife. The grass is going to hold more soil in place. The water coming off the grass will be cleaner than if we had just a solid stand of real thick pine trees with pine straw on the ground."

Wildlife habitat is a major objective of Hollinger's. Turkey and deer are plentiful on the property and he trades turkey and deer hunting rights on his land for duck hunting rights on land owned by some of his friends. He also is looking toward some non-consumptive uses such as wildlife viewing and photography. Pastures and trees are located for ease of viewing the wildlife as they cross the land.

Explaining his wildlife goals, Hollinger gave an overall picture of what he plans to do. He believes that when the pine trees are established the pasture will become a corridor between the various fields and some of the wildlife will move into the area. There is a ditch through the pasture along which a row of small saw tooth oaks has been planted to attract wildlife. Other wildlife plantings include about a quarter acre of persimmon trees, a row of chinquapins along a fence, and about a half acre of swamp chestnut oaks. In the future he would like to plant a few hardwood species such as poplar or oak.

Leo Hollinger and his wife, Jeannie, a county extension agent, enjoy their life in the country. Their legacy is one of good stewardship – to leave their land better than they found it, and to pass it on to their children and grandchildren. □

The Grass Really is Greener AND More Profitable

by Marie Bogner
Vice Chair
Illinois GLCI

Members of the Illinois Grasslands Conservation Initiative were pleased to welcome Illinois Director of Agriculture, Mr. Joe Hampton, to their quarterly meeting in Springfield last June. Director Hampton told the group, "We must be proactive about agriculture. You have got to have a vision, folks. It isn't going to fall out of the sky." Meeting participants representing beef, dairy, and sheep producers, as well as NRCS and Extension Service were in full agreement with Hampton.

After the Director spoke, the group had a discussion that focused on livestock grazing practices in Illinois. The discussion centered around the need to educate and motivate producers to re-establish grassland pastures and grazing areas throughout the state.

Ed Ballard, Extension Forage Specialist, stated that, "The key development factor for southern and western Illinois is livestock production, and Management-Intensive Grazing (MIG) is the way to raise livestock profitably." He went on to say, "We need to continue to educate producers about pasture management practices and about forages suitable for the different areas of Illinois."

Grazing filter strips for lake watersheds and conversion of row cropped lands to managed pastures and hay land were discussed as proactive approaches to soil and water stewardship. This would provide win/win situations for producers and the environment.

Benefits of Livestock Grazing

Excerpts from *ASI Weekly* (September 8, 2000)
Newsletter of the American Sheep Industry

An ambitious program of grazing, burning, mowing, and logging on Colorado's largest ranch – the 175,000 acre Forbes Trinchera Ranch – is showing some impressive wildlife habitat improvements according to an article in the September 2, 2000 issue of the *Denver Post*. Ranch workers, in cooperation with the Colorado Division of Wildlife's "Ranching for Wildlife" program, are thinning overgrown forests prone to wildfires, mowing and burning pastures of sagebrush, and grazing specific areas with about 1,000 cows to boost grass and shrub growth for the 3,500 elk and 4,500 mule deer on the ranch.

The grazing is done through contracts with local ranchers and is combined with the mowing and burning of sagebrush. Dense sagebrush is likened to old growth forests...once it reaches maturity, it shades out other



Members of the Illinois Grasslands Conservation Initiative group. Pictured L-R (front row) Jim Burrus, Roger Staff, A.J. Harland, Marie Bogner, Ed Ballard, and Terry Becherer. Pictured L-R (back row) Richard Hungerford, Lyle Behl, David Bowman, Cliff Schuette, Director Joe Hampton, John Caveny, Dave Suprenant, and Mike Stanfill.

A recent publication entitled "Growing the New Grasslands" was written by John Caveny, chairman of the Illinois GLCI. It highlights the scientific, environmental, and economic benefits of re-establishing grasslands in Illinois. The February issue of the *Illinois Steward* will feature individual beef, dairy, and sheep producers who are benefiting from Management-Intensive Grazing.

John Caveny told the group that "Green grass, blue skies, and fresh air is what everyone wants. Grass is the way to get it all, plus a profit for livestock producers." Illinois livestock producers are looking down to the soils that naturally produced the Illinois prairie grasslands and seeking a lesson of profitability while looking to the skies for the rain that makes the pastures green. □

plant life. To spur regeneration, several hundred acres of sage and pinon are burned each winter. During the summer, clearings are mowed with a "hydro-ax." When all of these practices are conducted at different times of the year, it can result in an increase in biomass of up to 988 percent.

The use of livestock to enhance grazing areas is nothing new, reports Tom McDonnell who is Director of Natural Resources for the American Sheep Industry. Range conditions on BLM lands have remained constant since 1922, and have improved considerably since the passage of the Taylor Grazing Act in 1936. The percentage of rangelands in good to excellent condition improved 122 percent from 1936 to 1999, while lands in low seral condition decreased 67 percent. McDonnell said, "The improvement and maintenance of range conditions is due to a large extent to livestock industry stewardship practices." □

THE CHAIR'S CORNER

On September 6th, I was honored to represent the Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative at the National NRCS Leadership Conference in Nebraska City, Nebraska. As keynote speaker, I had the opportunity to convey our message of voluntary technical assistance to all the NRCS State Conservationists, and to reinforce the idea that the GLCI and NRCS partnership is needed to keep America's grazing lands healthy. As a producer, myself, I know that this kind of collaboration is the only way to accomplish the desired result: healthy, productive grazing lands across America.

We have now reached a very critical period, and it is important to keep our message in front of society and public officials alike. The election of a new President will result in a new administration. During this transitional time, it is imperative that the GLCI's message does not disappear and that we support the appointment of a Secretary for Agriculture that knows the benefits of voluntary technical assistance to agricultural producers. By working together and with all of our member organizations, the next administration will recognize GLCI as an important and viable grassroots organization.

On a lighter note, we are happy to announce Joseph "Joe" Wright, president of V&W Farms, Inc., as the newest member of the National GLCI Steering Committee. Mr. Wright is a Florida Dairyman and will represent the Dairy Industry on the Steering Committee. Joe's technical and political knowledge will certainly be an asset to the National Steering Committee.

Finally, any State GLCI Coalition that is interested in developing a website or would like a link on the National GLCI website, please contact our webmaster, Monti Golla, via email at: Monti.Golla@tx.usda.gov or phone at: 979-268-0980.

See You in Vegas at the National Conference on Grazing Lands!

Bob Drake, Chairman

National GLCI Steering Committee