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A voluntary partnership with private landowners

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Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative

Graze or Die

Insight into the factors that influence change.

By Karen Hoffman, NY Natural Resources Conservation Service

A couple years ago, a friend of mine who is interested in health and nutrition gave me an article entitled “Change or Die.” Originally published in the May 2005 issue of *Fast Company* magazine, it was authored by Alan Deutschman, who has since written a book with the same title. The article was focused on how difficult it is for people to change their behavior, especially in terms of diet and exercise. For many reasons, I saw a direct parallel to animal agriculture. Let me explain. Research in health care has shown that when people are suffering from chronic and serious diseases, such as diabetes and heart disease, they are quite often told that they can improve their health or save their lives by changing their lifestyle choices. Eat better, exercise more, stop smoking or drinking alcohol – and the reasons given for making those changes are quite often presented based on the facts that doing those things can make a difference.

Yet most people do not change their lifestyle choices and behaviors when presented with the facts – facts are fairly uninspiring. The article states that 90% of coronary-artery bypass patients do not change their lifestyle behaviors after surgery, even though doing so would prevent them from dying. Even though they will end up dead, they don’t change. They only change their behavior when they are presented with the emotional reasons to change – live to see your grandchildren grow, be able to do things you really enjoy like more “romantic interludes” or sports with less or no pain, or be able to dance at your daughter’s wedding. It is the things that reach people at the emotional level that motivates them to change their lifestyle choices, not the facts.

Behavior change is also an issue for businesses, large or small. For any business to stay competitive, make a profit, or keep good employees, change needs to happen. The way businesses usually try to change is through encouraging behavior change, from the people in management all the way down through to entry-level positions. They spend money on training, team-building activities such as retreats, transition strategies, and so forth, all in an attempt to “force” people to change the way they behave. However, as the article points out, behavior change is extremely difficult, even for the best of us. We need emotional reasons to do so, yet we are constantly presented with the factual reasons instead.

So, how does this relate to animal agriculture? It’s fairly easy when you look across the landscape and see how many farms have died over the last few decades because they were unwilling to change how they farmed.

Those of us in the roles of “agency advisors” to farmers have been guilty of presenting our clientele with “the facts” for far too long. When we talk to a dairy farmer about switching from confinement to free-range, we often present the facts about animal welfare, the environment, and the market. While these are important factors, they are often not enough to motivate a farmer to change. We need to present the emotional reasons why change is beneficial, such as improved animal health, reduced costs, and increased market demand for sustainable products.

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Graze or Die

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ment feeding year-round to grazing their cows for 6 months of the year, we tell them about how their feed costs will drop, cow health will improve, and equipment will require less maintenance and repair. We show them the results of studies – tables of economic data, charts of pasture protein levels compared to stored forage, and diagrams of grass growth rates – but rarely do we talk about things that have emotional appeal.

Sales people have always been quite good at making emotional appeals to both farm and non-farm consumers when they are trying to make a sale. That is why we buy new cars and trucks with all the safety options (for the kids), the big screen television (for the kids and to make your friends jealous), and the tractors with comfort cabs, GPS-computer units, and lots of horsepower (for the kids...no wait, to make your tractor-time more enjoyable, as well as to make friends and farming neighbors jealous). Regardless of who you are, or what you do for a living, the emotional sales pitch almost always works.

Emotional Qualities

Is there any emotional appeal of grazing? Of course there is! However, as pointed out above, we agency staff do our best to present our “unbiased”, and fairly unemotional, opinions. Those who have been grazing on their farms are the best advocates for grazing, because they experience the emotional benefits on a daily basis. They point out things like more time to spend with kids, and doing things with kids on the farm that are safer and more enjoyable, as well as the prospect that the kids may want to come back to the farm when they are older.

Quality time with a spouse is another emotionally appealing aspect of grazing, because you’re not going to be stuck on a tractor from dawn till dusk during the spring and summer as much – the animals do much of the harvest.

Being able to sleep at night because the bank and the feed company aren’t watching you like a hawk to make sure you make your payments – you become a customer they can count on to be on time. Grazing provides more money to take a family vacation, and the ability to hire a relief milker who doesn’t have to do much other than milk and open a gate. There are many other examples of how grazing can improve the quality of a farm family’s life – just ask any grazier!

If you’re reading this, you probably have an interest in grazing, so this may be preaching to the choir. If you don’t have an interest in grazing, and you’ve read this far, I applaud you and hope you can now consider grazing as an option for your family and your farm that has many other qualitative benefits.

We need more grass-based, thriving farms and farm families, not farms that are on the verge of extinction as a result of not being willing to change. Regardless of where you are with grazing, I hope you will pass this article on to people you know who need to recognize the benefits of grazing – or they just might be part of those dying farms.

Karen Hoffman, is an animal scientist with the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service in Norwich, NY. This article originally appeared in the Cornell Small Farms Quarterly publication.

As the New York State GLCI Coordinator, Karen also produces a monthly e-newsletter called the GLCI Gazette. It highlights upcoming events in the region as well as offers grazing tips and resources. To subscribe to the free newsletter, email her at karen.hoffman2@ny.usda.gov.

Grazing With A Goal

A special targeted grazing conference will be held Sept. 25-26 at Pennsylvania Furnace, PA. The seminar will help participants learn and apply the principles of targeted grazing and offers the opportunity to develop an actual targeted grazing plan with a real case study.

Targeted grazing represents the application of a specific kind of livestock at a determined season, duration and intensity to accomplish defined vegetation and landscape enhancement goals.

This seminar is being sponsored by the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the American Sheep Industry Association, American Land and Resources Foundation, the National Sheep Industry Improvement Center, Joe Skeen Institute for Rangeland Restoration and the Montana Sheep Institute.

There is a \$50 registration fee for the workshop. Call or e-mail Rochelle Oxarango at 208-547-0777 or targetgraze@pmt.org to register. For more information see sheepusa.org/Targeted-Grazing/ and www.cnr.uidaho.edu/rx-grazing/.

MORE UPCOMING GRAZING EVENTS

Sept. 30 - Oct. 4 -- World Dairy Expo, Madison, WI. Visit www.worlddairyexpo.com.

Oct. 6-8 -- Alternatives for Sustainable Grasslands Conference, Valentine, NE. Hosted by Nebraska and South Dakota sections of the Society for Range Management and the Nebraska and South Dakota Grasslands Coalitions. For more information contact Mary Reece at 308-532-4640 or Mary.reece@ne.usda.gov.

Oct. 23 -- Kentucky Grazing Conference, Lexington. Learn more at www.uky.edu/Ag/Forage/.

Oct. 31 - Nov. 2 -- Virginia Equine Extravaganza, Richmond. See www.equineextravaganza.com.

Nov. 6-7 -- 2008 BEEF Quality Summit, sponsored by BEEF magazine, Colorado Springs, CO. Visit beefconference.com/.

Dec. 5-6 -- 2008 Missouri Livestock Symposium, Kirksville. Details at missourilivestock.com, or call Bruce Lane at 660-665-9866.

Jan. 21-22, 2009 -- Heart of America Grazing Conference, Columbus, IN. Contact Jason Tower at 812-678-4427 or towjerj@purdue.edu.

June 21-23, 2009 -- American Forage & Grassland Council Annual Conference, Amway Grand Plaza Hotel, Grand Rapids, MI. Call 800-944-2342 or email info@afgc.org. Calendar

Submit your upcoming grazing events for the Sept./Oct. issue to office@gordonresources.com.

ADDITIONAL \$202.5 MILLION ANNOUNCED FOR CONSERVATION PROGRAMS

Source: USDA

An additional \$200 million will be made available through the 2008 Farm Bill to help farmers and ranchers nationwide to solve natural resource problems through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). An additional \$2.5 million will be available for Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) in 16 states.

"These additional funds will assist farmers and ranchers in solving critical natural resource problems," says Agriculture Secretary Ed Schafer Schafer. "Voluntary incentive-based programs like EQIP and AMA are the key to helping producers meet their conservation goals and provide the public with important benefits such as cleaner water, improved air quality, healthy soils, and abundant wildlife."

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS) administers EQIP and AMA, which provide financial and technical assistance to producers.

EQIP helps farmers and ranchers improve agricultural production while protecting environmental quality. EQIP offers up to 75% in cost share to help producers install or implement structural and management practices on private agricultural land. Limited resource producers and beginning farmers and ranchers may be eligible for higher rates in EQIP-up to 90% in cost-share assistance-to address their natural resource issues.

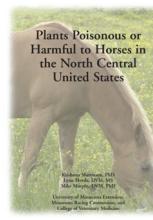
With this extra funding, USDA has provided a total of \$1.2 billion available to producers in fiscal year 2008 for EQIP. To date, approximately 38,000 producers signed contracts covering nearly 14 million acres valued at almost \$745 million for EQIP.

AMA offers farmers and ranchers cost-share of up to 75% and incentive payments to address risk management concerns to their agricultural enterprises linked to water management, water quality and erosion control. The program is available in the following 16 states where participation in the Federal Crop Insurance Program is historically low: Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Utah, Vermont, West Virginia and Wyoming. Hawaii was added this fiscal year when Congress authorized the 2008 Farm Bill.

USDA has provided \$7.5 million to producers in 15 states for AMA thus far this fiscal year. Producers have signed 181 contracts covering 13,100 acres valued at about \$3.4 million. For additional information, please visit <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/eqip>.

NEW BOOK HIGHLIGHTS HARMFUL PLANTS FOR HORSES

A new book provides research-based information about 18 plants or groups of plants that may be poisonous to horses. Written by University of Minnesota experts, the 44-page book, *Plants Poisonous or Harmful to Horses in the North Central United States*, includes almost 70 color photos. Information is included on the plants' life cycles, identification, distribution and control. The book can be viewed as a PDF file at www.extension.umn.edu/horse/components/pdfs/PlantsPoisonousHorses.pdf. Order it online from the University of Minnesota Extension Service for \$10 at shop.extension.umn.edu/PublicationDetail.aspx?ID=1923.



TEXAS EXTENSION OFFERS ONLINE COURSES FOR SMALL-ACREAGE LANDOWNERS

Owners of small farms and ranches now have access to Web-based help for managing their land. Three online courses designed for agricultural novices are offered by the Texas AgriLife Extension Service.

The courses were organized to meet the demand for information from the growing group of small-acreage landowners. The number of Texas farms with 10 to 49 acres grew by 13 percent between 1997 and 2002, according to the census. By comparison, the number of farms with 2,000 acres or more remained about the same.

The new landowners are often city dwellers who buy rural property for retirement, an alternative source of income or a lifestyle change. The online courses were developed to help them learn more about managing their land with regard to conservation.

Courses being offered include: Resource Inventory; Beef Cattle Management and Pasture Management. There is a fee for the online classes.

Landowners should take the Resource Inventory course first, as it answers the question, 'I've got this land, now what do I do with it?'

For more information, visit the Small Acreage Landowner Webcourse Web site at <http://grovesite.com/TAMU/RI>. AgriLife Extension plans to expand the course offerings to include horse production and rainwater harvesting.

SEVEN STEWARDS SELECTED

Seven regional winners have been named by the 2008 National Environmental Stewardship Award Selection Committee. The seven honorees will vie for the 18th national honor to be awarded in January 2009. The honorees include:

- Region I: Sennett Cattle Co, Waynetown, IN.
- Region II: Yon Family Farms, Ridge Springs, SC.
- Region III: Guge Family Farm, Estherville, IA.
- Region IV: Bradley 3 Ranch, Memphis, TX.
- Region V: Veseth Cattle Co, Malta, MT.
- Region VI: Babacomari Ranch, Sonoita, AZ.
- Region VII: Hovde Ranch, Alexander, ND.

"These families have successfully conducted stewardship practices that serve as exemplary models for all cattle producers. They are actively working to protect and improve the environment and have proven that stewardship and good business can go hand-in-hand," says Dave Petty, a former national Environmental Stewardship Award Program (ESAP) winner from Iowa. The annual award is made possible through sponsorship from Dow Agrosciences and the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

To learn more about ESAP, visit: esap.beefusa.org/program.aspx.

Call For Papers to Fourth National Conference On Grazing Lands

The Fourth National Conference on Grazing Lands (4NCGL) is being planned for Dec. 2009 and a call for papers for the event is underway.

The conference objective is "To Heighten Awareness of the Economic and Environmental Benefits of Grazing Lands," and its theme is "Grazing Lands – A Winning Hand," – in keeping with the Reno-Sparks location where the conference will be held Dec. 13-16, 2009 at John Ascuaga's Nugget Hotel & Casino.

The conference is designed to provide a forum for discussions and exchange of information, technology transfer, identification of research and program needs, marketing of products, services, and other benefits of grazing. It will be organized into four "tracks," 1) western grazing lands, 2) central grazing lands, 3) eastern grazing lands, and 4) dairy grazing land management. The conference sponsors are accepting abstracts for oral and poster papers in the following categories within each track:

Issues concerning the agricultural – urban interface.

Successful "cutting edge" management technologies for grazing practices.

Economic/marketing implications of grazing.

Public Policy implications of grazing.

The optimizing of grazing land health for environmental and social benefits.

Abstract submissions should indicate both the track and category where the abstract best fits. Farmers and ranchers are particularly encouraged to present. Poster boards will be provided for poster paper presenters.

The conference is being hosted by the Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI), the Society for Range Management (SRM), and a number of sponsoring organizations. The target audience includes producers, academics, consumers, government agency officials, conservationists, environmentalists, urban based resource interests, grazing land managers, landowners, and others interested in effective natural resources management.

All accepted papers and poster abstracts are eligible for publication in the conference proceedings. To submit your abstract, prepare a 400 word, or less, description of your presentation, and indicate oral or poster. Instructions for electronic abstract submission will be available in November 2008 on the GLCI website, <http://www.glc.org>. Abstract deadline is May 1st, 2009. It is preferred that abstracts be submitted electronically. If you cannot submit electronically, submit by fax or mail. Include your name, address, phone and fax numbers, and e-mail address with your abstract and mail, fax or email to John W. Peterson, 4NCGL Conference Manager, 9304 Lundy Court, Burke, VA 22015-3431. John's telephone no. is 703-455-4387 or 6886, cell. 703-505-1782, fax 703-455-6888, e-mail jwpeterson@cox.net.

Notification of accepted abstracts will start in June 2009. If your oral abstract is accepted, the full paper is due September 1, 2009. Maximum length of final manuscripts is 6000 words, about 9 pages. Volunteer presenters are responsible for providing their own conference travel, registration and other expenses.

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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