

MARYLAND GRAZER'S NETWORK NEWS & NOTABLES

Mentoring Profile – The First Nine Months

COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS:

Chesapeake Bay Funders' Network



David L. Greene, Mentor
Principal Agent Emeritus
University of Maryland
Cooperative Extension

The first nine months have been very rewarding from this end of the mentoring program. After the introduction by phone with the farmers I was asked to assist. A visit to my farm was arranged so they could get acquainted with me. They were shown how we utilize our pastures in a rotational grazing program that runs about 85 ewes on 17 acres including hay ground.

The first meeting at the

host farm was primarily a fact finding mission on my part so that I could better understand the land, labor, live-stock, and machinery resources available. At this time, it was learned of their commitment to the eventual production of grass-fed beef and lamb to sell at a roadside market located on the farm. It was also learned that the farm was applying for an EQIP grant to establish the rotational grazing system. A subsequent meeting was arranged with the NRCS District



David Greene Grading Wool
Photo by Peggy Howell (Maryland Sheep Breeders Association)

Conservationist to learn more about the EQIP program requirements and the time table to meet those requirements.

The farmer had some immediate needs that

Continued on page 4

Marketing Matters: Profiling the Grass-fed Customer

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

More about Marketing Matters	2
Local Food Locators	3
Traits of Good Grazing Dairy Cattle	5
Calendar	4
Why rising Food Costs	8
Other Resources	9

Ginger S. Myers
Regional Marketing Specialist
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The National Meat Case Study, sponsored by Sealed Air's Cryovac Food Packaging, the Beef Checkoff, and the National Pork Board, offers insights on trends and strategies to meat case merchandising to better appeal to consumers.

The 2007 survey found that packages of natural and organic labeled meats increased to 29 percent of the total packaged meats offered in the 121 retail supermarkets, 10 club stores, and 48 metro markets surveyed.

Chicken, at 67 percent, had the highest amount of packages including a natural claim followed by ground beef at 25



Photo by Cryovac Food Packaging

percent and fresh pork at 15 percent.

But "natural" is erroneously thought by the consumer to mean that no antibiotics or hormones, etc. were used in its production. Products containing no

Continued on page 2

Marketing Matters continued from page 1

added colors or flavors and only minimally processed may also be labeled natural, often leaving this labeling term very ambiguous. On the other hand, grass-fed can be very specific in describing both its production methods and husbandry.

With touts of consumer demand outstripping product supply of most grass-fed products, can we verify that if you produce it, they will buy it? And more importantly, will they pay a premium price for it?

In 2004, the grass-fed beef industry was estimated to be worth around \$5 billion, and growing at a rate of 20 percent per year. Angela Pride, Organic Grass-fed Beef Coalition, Vermillion, S.D. (www.organicgrassfedbeef.org) says her organization shows that the majority purchasing grass-fed beef are women who are younger, highly educated, and more affluent. The group purchasing these products was in the 25 to 39 year-old age bracket. But Jerry Jost, with the Kansas Rural Center, cautions that simply advertising to consumers with affluence but unknown health interests doesn't pay off.

Important attributes with grass-fed marketing:

- Good taste
- Pesticide-free food (for customers with chemical sensitivities)
- A healthy, high-protein diet (for reduction of cancer risk or for cancer patients)
- No growth hormones, antibiotics, or animal by-product rations
- Safe food with no danger of E. coli or BSE
- Lean meat
- Animal welfare
- Cost-saving through prices lower than the store
- Convenience
- Desire to support producers and eat locally raised foods



What can grass-fed producers offer the market? Studies including Colorado State University and Auburn University showed a taste preference of about 25 percent for grass-fed beef. About half of the participants had no preference. So, consumer choice in whether they buy grass-fed or grain-fed beef (and other grass-fed products) is often predicated on the other attributes grass-fed producers have to sell.

Today's consumers want to buy more than a cut of meat or a quart of milk. They want to feel they are investing in a "story" about the attributes of their food. Those wants could be grass-fed, hormone and antibiotic free, animal welfare issues, environmental concerns, better quality without deception, and source verified. Direct marketing your products helps you maximize these attributes in your marketing materials and labels.

Will consumers pay a premium for grass-fed products? They already do for grass-fed poultry and eggs. Pastured broilers sell for between \$1.75 and \$3.50 per pound, dressed weight. Pastured turkeys sell between \$2.25 and \$4.00 per pound. Prices vary among producers. Production costs are usually about 1/2 to 2/3 the sale price. Milk from grass-fed dairies is currently not segregated, but many organic dairy producers utilize grass-based feeding systems. Organic Valley milk, for instance, can run anywhere from \$3.29 to \$3.99 a half-gallon and up to \$5.99 a gallon. These prices range from 30-50% higher than those paid for the same conventionally raised products.

Marketing Matters continued from page 2

Numerous studies confirm that consumers are willing to pay a premium price of at least 10% over "typical retail price" for locally produced meat. What we don't know, however, is whether the public is willing to seek out these products in unfamiliar locations and change their purchase behavior even if they prefer these products. Certain products, like dairy, that have gained entry into the mainstream supermarkets, have done better than those who have not.

Today's customers want variety and consistency in their meat and dairy products, better pricing, smaller portion sizes, and better quality without deception. The challenge for grass-fed producers is to meet those needs with a product that is tender and flavorful, wholesome, locally grown, available year round, and locally marketed.



Local Food Locators

The "Maryland Hospitals' Buy Local" Awareness Week recently published this list of local food resources to assist Maryland consumers and health professionals to source local foods. Our compliments to Louise Mitchell for compiling this very useful list.

- Maryland's Best - www.marylandsbest.net
- Seasonal Harvest Chart - www.marylandsbest.net/in_season.php
- Farmers' Market Directory - www.mda.state.md.us/md_products
- "Pick Your Own" Farms - www.pickyourown.org/MD.htm
- Sustainable Table - www.sustainabletable.org
- Local Harvest - www.localharvest.org
- Recipes for Seasonal Foods - www.freshfarmmarkets.org/market_recipes.php
- Healthy Food in Health Care - www.healthyfoodinhealthcare.org

Maryland Producer Featured in NE SARE Sustainable Livestock Production DVD

Robin Way
Rumbleway Farm



A multi-species approach to farming is by far more beneficial to the land and those using it. There are many facets to our farm, and we show how each of these parts fit in with the whole picture of sustainable farming. This twenty-two minute video showcases many of our techniques and sustainable practices, including poultry, beef cattle, rabbits, ducks,

goats, marketing, and sales. The video is available in DVD format for distribution to farmers, and shows how animals, crops, direct sales, and on farm promotions all fit in with the whole picture of sustainable farming. For more information contact Robin Way at 410-658-9731 or wayrg@dol.net.

Mentoring Profile continued from page 1

fit into the long term goal of the grazing program of establishing two forage stands of alfalfa/orchardgrass and a pure alfalfa stand. Help was given in locating seed suppliers and recommendations for establishment and forage management. It was felt that if these forage stands could be successfully be established, then the first year's goals would be met as far as field work was concerned.

With any endeavor of this type, long-term planning is essential for success. The rest of the contacts made with the farm producer has revolved around how the long term goal of producing grass-fed beef and lamb can be accomplished.

We were able to attend the Hedgeapple Farm Field Day recently which was extremely helpful in seeing an operation already successful in this type of production. In addition, plans have been made to use the expertise of the staff at Hedgeapple Farm in the planning of the rotational grazing system and the adjustments to the beef herd needed to produce high quality grass-fed beef.

It was mutually agreed that a farm business and marketing plan would be essential in estimating the potential for long-term success of this venture. Therefore, in the months ahead, meetings will be held to develop plans for pasture management, herd management, farm business management and grass-fed beef and lamb marketing.

Obviously, changing a traditional small scale beef and sheep farm into a highly sophisticated grass-fed beef and lamb operation is a major undertaking. Success is only possible with a lot of thought and planning. Fortunately, the Maryland Grazing Mentoring Program has assembled many qualified experts that are available to lend assistance.

I see my role as a catalyst to help pull all of these individuals into the discussion when needed. So far it has been only myself and the NRCS District Conservationist that have met with the farm owner and manager. Other resource people will be utilized as we move ahead this fall when farm work slows down a little.



Photo from Hedgeapple Farm – www.hedgeapplefarm.com

Hedgeapple Farm

Hedgeapple Farm is situated along the Monocacy River and owned and operated by the Jorgensen's. In 1997, the Jorgensen's gifted a conservation easement to the Maryland Environmental Trust to ensure against development.

The farm is operated for the benefit of beef producers in Maryland and the surrounding region, focusing on the development and feasibility of production and marketing strategies. Outreach programs and tours are conducted several times throughout the year to educate not only beef producers, but also members of the general public who are interested in farm life and the operation itself. Learn more about Hedgeapple Farm at www.hedgeapplefarm.com

UPCOMING MEETINGS IN 2009

January 6

Delmarva Hay & Pasture Conference

Delaware State Fairgrounds, Harrington, DE.

January 7

Southern Maryland Hay & Pasture Conference

Izaak Walton League Outdoor Education Center, Waldorf, MD.

January 8

Tri-State Hay & Pasture Conference

Location TBA.

March 6-7

Joint Maryland Cattlemen's Convention/ Central Maryland Hay & Pasture Conference

Sheraton Four Points, Hagerstown, MD.

September 5

Hay and Pasture Day

Maryland State Fair, Timonium, MD.

For more information contact:

Les Vough, vough@umd.edu

Advice from a Dairy Grazer Mentor



Ron Holter, Holterholm Farm
Season Dairyman and Mentor
Photo by Dale Johnson

Some dairy breeds may be better able to graze and use high quality forage. However, there is considerable variation among individuals within breeds. Culling those that

aren't adapted to a forage-based system is essential to achieving a profitable grass-based dairy operation.

The dairy industry has focused on high production under confinement for many generations of cows. High milk production has been bred into cows at the expense of body condition. Thus, many U.S. dairy cows with high milk producing genes will tend to lose condition and will not milk to their genetic potential in a grass-based setting. For this reason, some grass-based dairies are crossing the predominant Holstein strain cattle with Jersey, Brown

Swiss or importing genetics from New Zealand, where no grain is fed to dairy animals. These breeding programs decrease the size of the cows, but increase their ability to produce on pastures.

Ron and Kathy Holter, along with their two children, dairy on 207 acres in Frederick County, Maryland. Ron converted his family farm from a traditional confinement operation to a seasonal grass-based dairy in 1997. In 1998, he replaced his 98 head of Holsteins with Jerseys and, in 2000, he became a certified organic producer.

Ron is an excellent mentor with the Maryland Grazers' Network.

Here are the traits he looks for in profitable grazing cattle:

- Wide muzzle and large nostrils so they can take in large amounts of pasture in each bite and take in large amounts of air. She is an athlete.
- Strong front end with a lot of width between the front legs and a deep chest that allows for easy moving and good air and blood flow.
- Wide, deep, open barrel that allows for maximum intake of forages.
- Udder attached nicely and above the hocks. This keeps it clean.
- Wide thurls centrally located between hips and pins. This allows for easy movement and easy calving.
- Wide rear legs to prevent banging her udder.
- A smaller sized cow with short legs. Smaller cows are more efficient at converting pasture to milk due to less feed going to body maintenance, and they are easier on the pasture in wet conditions. They also handle summer heat better.
- Polled head which eliminates the need to dehorn and is more humane than dehorning.
- Lighter color. These animals can handle heat better.

Similar traits in a bull, except for the udder. He must be very masculine with a strong front end; very broad through the chest and neck.



Jersey Cows

"I want my cows to have a wide muzzle and large nostrils. Then they can take in large amounts of pasture in each bite and take in large amounts of air. She is an athlete."



Proper Pasture Proper Planning Prevents Poor Pasture Establishment and Performance

Les Vough, Forage Crops Extension Specialist Emeritus, University of Maryland



High-yielding, high-quality pasture is the foundation for profitable feeding programs. But many pastures in the Mid-Atlantic Region have low productivity, primarily due to the lack of adequate fertilization, poor grazing management and the nature of the species present. It is too late to make pasture seedings this year, but now is the perfect time to begin planning for seedings to be made in 2009 or 2010. Precise management practices are necessary to be successful and it all begins with a management plan prior to the actual seeding.

Apply the principle of the **6 P's** as the first step in the procedure for seeding new pastures or renovating old pastures – **Proper Planning Prevents Poor Pasture Performance**. Most seeding failures are a result of a lack of proper advance planning and preparation rather than equipment problems or seeding techniques. The following guidelines are designed to help you make the proper preparations so that the seeding will have the best chances of being successful.



Begin Planning 6 to 24 Months Prior to Seeding

Preparations for seeding must begin as much as 2 years prior to the actual planting of the seed, especially for no-till seedings in which lime and fertilizer cannot be incorporated and mixed into the soil. Most old, permanent pastures and existing grasslands needing reseeding will require lime, fertilizer, and weed control. These treatments should be applied 6 to 24 months prior to seeding.

Unless you do not yet have live-stock on the farm, do not attempt to reseed or renovate all of the pasture acreage at one time, especially if finances are limited for pasture improvement. When initiating a pasture seeding or renovation program, begin the process with the most productive soils on the farm and end up with the soils needing the largest amounts of lime and fertilizer. The better the soil condi-

tions, the greater the potential improvement from renovation.

If you do not have the money to apply the amounts of lime and fertilizer recommended by soil test, it is far better to reduce the area to be seeded or renovated and apply the full amount to that area than to spread inadequate amounts of lime and fertilizer over a larger area.



Control Broadleaf Weeds

Perennial broadleaf weeds are usually present in permanent pastures and in many crop land fields being converted to pasture, especially those that have been poorly managed. Successful establishment of new pastures or renovation of old pastures is dependent upon elimination of these weeds prior to the time of seeding. For best results the weed control program should also begin 6 to 24 months before seeding. Dicamba (Banvel) and 2,4-D are excellent herbicides to use for broadleaf weed control, and

there are other herbicides that can be used. Consult with your local Cooperative Extension, Natural Resources Conservation Service/Soil Conservation District or farm supply/commercial applicator personnel for appropriate herbicide materials and rates of application for your particular needs. Herbicide materials and formulations are constantly changing so always check for the latest recommendations before making applications.

For late winter seeding: Apply 2,4-D amine or low volatile ester

and/or dicamba, or other broadleaf herbicides, the previous fall (mid- September to early October) while the weeds to be controlled are actively growing. Observe grazing restrictions.

For late summer seeding: Again, it is most effective to apply 2,4-D amine or low volatile ester and/or dicamba, or other broadleaf herbicides, the previous fall. If they were not applied the previous fall, they can be applied in mid-July but the treatment is often less effective. Observe grazing restrictions.

Proper Pasture continued from page 6



Determine Soil Nutrient Levels - Soil Test

For no-till seedings, soil samples should be taken to a 2-inch depth and indicated on the soil test questionnaire as a no-till forage seeding. If the field will be tilled (plowed, disked, etc.) prior to seeding, soil samples should be taken to an 8-inch depth. A shortage of

one nutrient results in poor utilization of other nutrients and generally results in substantial yield loss. On the other hand, using more of any nutrient than is necessary is not only inefficient but is a waste of money and may be damaging to the environment. It takes time for lime

and some fertilizer materials to react with the soil and change the pH and fertility levels, especially when applied to the soil surface and not incorporated or mixed into the soil, so these materials should be applied 6 to 24 months prior to seeding.



Apply the Recommended Amounts of Lime and Fertilizer

Satisfactory stands and yields are obtained only when the pasture is adequately limed and fertilized. Producers should not attempt to renovate unless they are willing to apply the required lime and fertilizer. Lack of adequate lime on acid soils is the greatest deterrent to high forage production since it affects the efficient utilization of other materials used. Lime not only increases the availability of

practically all the essential plant nutrients but also promotes the growth of desirable microorganisms and reduces the toxic effects of aluminum and manganese. Lime should be applied 6 to 12 months prior to seeding. Phosphorus is especially critical for young seedlings. Phosphorus is also commonly a limiting factor on unproductive, poorly managed pastures. Potassium is often not as deficient as phos-

phorus, but may become a limiting factor after soils have been under more intensive production for some time. Nitrogen should not be applied in renovation seedings as it quickly stimulates growth of the existing grass and weeds, leading to excessive shading of young seedlings and undue competition for water and soil nutrients.

Summary

Critical to the success of all new pastures and renovation of all old pastures is proper planning prior to the actual seeding so that weeds have been controlled and soil pH and fertility are at optimum levels at the time of seeding. Proper planning helps to ensure that your investments in time, labor, and seed will pay off.

Dairy Farm Pasture Walk

Maryland Cooperative Extension announces this upcoming Pasture Walk for Frederick and Washington Counties.

December 4 - 10:00 AM

Wilnan Farm (Billy and Nancy Horton), 15102 Liberty Rd, Mount Airy, MD. From Frederick go east on MD 26/Liberty Rd. 15 miles to farm on left. 60 Holstein and Holstein crossed with Jersey or Brown Swiss on 90 acres of grass. Billy is planning to plant brassicas, turnips, and small grains in the fall for early winter grazing.

For more information, Contact:

Stanley Fultz, Extension Agent
MCE Frederick County
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Jeff Semler, Extension Educator
MCE Washington County
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Go Grass?

Will changing to grass-based farming increase profits for my farm business?



The amount of money left over after subtracting all costs from all income is profit. Conventional farms and grass-based farms can both be profitable. Making the decision to change to a grass-based farm should be based on careful analysis of the alternatives that will make the most efficient use of both the farms and the manager's available resources that meet with the farm family's long-term goals.

The resources and management required to develop a profitable grass-based or conventional farm can be very different. Grass-based farms rely very heavily on

manipulation of the animal-plant system to provide forages while minimizing use of harvest equipment and storage. The tradeoffs between the two systems require that management pay close attention to how their resources are used to produce a pound of milk or meat for the lowest per unit cost. Thus, a farm with land that is not suited to row crop production may be better suited to grass-based production. In addition, grass-based production may be a better choice for a beginning farmer with limited access to capital for machinery, equipment, and buildings.

Why are Food Prices Rising?

Factors behind the surge in prices include high energy and fertilizer prices, a declining U.S. dollar, drought in big producing countries including Australia, rising demand from fast-growing economies such as China and India, high oil prices that have pushed up production costs, and dwindling stocks.

Rising investment inflows in food commodity futures markets and hedge fund activity have hiked prices further.

Experts have also blamed a big push in biofuels programs that have diverted land and crops from food production.

Export restrictions imposed by countries including India and China on rice, and by Argentina, Kazakhstan and Russia on wheat, have cut international supplies. Actions by large rice importers, such as the Philippines, in floating large tenders to obtain needed rice imports, have boosted prices.

Forecasts by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and OECD-FAO say prices will remain high in 2008. The Agricultural Outlook 2008-2017 by the OECD-FAO shows this upward trend:

- Up 20 percent for beef and pork.
- Up 30 percent for sugar.
- Up 30 percent for rice.
- Up 40-60 percent for wheat, maize and skimmed milk powder.
- Up 60 percent for butter and oilseeds.
- Up 80 percent or more for vegetable oils.



10th Future Harvest CASA Annual Conference

"Connecting Local Food, Farms & Communities"

January 16-17, 2009

NEW LOCATION

Frederick Holiday Inn & Conference Center, 5400 Holiday Dr., Frederick, MD.
Pre-Conference Session – Agritourism & Rodale Institute Presentations

Keynote Speaker– Nina Plank

Sessions feature

- Sustainable Production
- Growing Nitrogen
- Marketing
- Grain & Hay
- Growing New Farmers

The Maryland Grazers' Network will present two sessions on designing and maximizing grass-based farming systems.

For more information contact: Jack Gurley at giftcal@aol.com

RESOURCES ON THE WEB

Center for Dairy Profitability



<http://cdp.wisc.edu/pasturebudgets.htm>

This site has a lot of information about grass-based dairying. The link listed goes to a page featuring budgets for pasture establishment. Although the site uses Wisconsin numbers, the format and general information applies to dairy grazing operations across the country. This site also hosts an interesting newsletter - "Grass Clippings – A Wisconsin Dairy Newsletter."

Agricultural Marketing Resource Center

www.agmrc.org/agmrc/commodity/livestock/beef/beef.htm.

A national information center for value-added agriculture information on "natural," organic, and direct marketing beef.

ATTRA



<http://attra.ncat.org>

National information service offers 200+ free publications on farming and marketing, many about livestock production and marketing.

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FIND OUT MORE ABOUT OUR MARYLAND GRAZER'S NETWORK PARTNERS:

Chesapeake Bay Funders Network
<http://www.chesbayfunders.org>

Maryland Cooperative Extension
<http://extension.umd.edu>

**USDA National Resources
Conservation Service**
<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/>

Future Harvest
<http://www.futureharvestcasa.org/>

Chesapeake Bay Foundation
<http://www.cbf.org>

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