

SPOTLIGHT - George Boody and the Severson Family⁶ on reintegrating livestock in row crop country

George Boody, former Executive Director of the Land Stewardship Project for 23 years, is currently a Senior Fellow with the School of Agriculture Endowed Chair in Agricultural Systems of the University of Minnesota College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences, managed by the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture. Boody's focus in this position is to connect with farmers who are reintegrating livestock into their row crop operations, and to learn from and communicate their experiences. This project will feature many farmers who are actively diversifying their operations and making changes to support multiple generations on the farm.



Credit: Grand View Beef

Boody shares, “There are numerous barriers that prevent farmers from adopting continuous living cover (CLC) practices on their land, perhaps the first of which starts between the ears. Willingness to experiment is important, and after that, farmers also need relationships with other farmers and landowners, technical support, policy changes that favor CLC and livestock integration, markets for their product, and financial resources.”

“Over 20% of the land in the corn belt is considered ‘marginal’ in economic or ecological terms. Some of this marginal land is perfectly suited for reintegration of cattle. For example, in the Blue Earth River Basin of Minnesota, existing small to mid-size beef cattle drylot feeding operations would be a great target for re-integration of livestock into row crops. These feedlot cattle are mostly confined, but not in large CAFOs (concentrated animal feeding operations). They could be moved onto cover crops or corn stalks for a few months out of the year to cut down on feed costs to the farmer and simultaneously add CLC to their operation in a very economically viable way.”



Credit: Grand View Beef

Additionally, integration of CLC and cattle into row crop country can provide extra income that allows multiple generations to return to the farm. Take, for example, the Severson family of south-central Iowa. Troy and Beth Severson own and operate a hay, corn, soybeans, and cow/calf operation. When their son Knute and daughter-in-law Amanda wanted to return to the farm, the integration of a 100% grass-fed beef operation was what allowed these families to begin to increase their earnings on the land. Knute and Amanda moved back to Iowa to start their business, Grand View Beef, purchasing steer calves from Troy and Beth's cow/calf operation. Despite being faced with substantial initial investment and a steep learning curve, their investment is gaining traction and now able to pay for itself and the land occupied by the

cattle. Meanwhile, the Severson family continues to try new practices, like converting more corn and soybean acres to pasture, as it is now economically viable for their operation; they also actively support other farmers looking to diversify their operations in similar ways.