

Green Lands Blue Waters - November Newsletter

Midwest Perennial Forage Working Group

Green Lands Blue Waters assembled the [Midwest Perennial Forage Working Group](#) (MPFWG) in 2011 to help advance the perennial forage piece of the strategy for achieving Continuous Living Cover (CLC) in agricultural systems. While the mission of the Working Group is increasing CLC on the landscape through forage and grazing, the group has defined its sphere of work as support for grazing educators. Over the years, members have expanded their embrace of grazing beyond traditional pastures and forages to include grazing of cover crops, crop residues, and agroforestry.

Most of the group's members are grazing educators: independent consultants, staff of non-profit organizations, NRCS and state agency staff, University faculty, Extension educators. Many are farmers as well. Grazing educators are scattered across the GLBW region. This Working Group is a way for them to get together, share information about projects they're working on, and have conversation with others who thoroughly understand their work, interests, and concerns.

Current co-chairs of the Working Group are Meghan Filbert of NoFence and Margaret Chamas of Practical Farmers of Iowa. Jane Jewett of Green Lands Blue Waters provides staff support to the group. MPFWG membership is open to grazing educators in the Green Lands Blue Waters region (IA, IL, MN, MO, WI). Membership is entirely self-selected. If you're a grazing educator, or want to be, or used to be and have some wisdom to share - you are welcome! We meet quarterly. Winter, spring, and summer meetings are online, and the fall meeting is in-person in Decorah, IA. Contact Jane Jewett to be added to the mailing list and introduced to the co-chairs: jewet006@umn.edu

Creating space for fruitful discussions about grazing research, education, and outreach needs generates collaboration on funding proposals and projects. Some projects led or assisted by the Working Group in recent years... [read more](#)

- Midwest Grazing Exchange.. Encouragement from the Working Group and some seed money from GLBW helped Meghan Filbert, then with Practical Farmers of Iowa, and the Pasture Project run by Wallace Center at Winrock International, turn an Iowa project idea into a multi-state effort that is now led by the Pasture Project and covers IA, IL, IN, MI, MN, MO, and WI.
<https://www.midwestgrazingexchange.com/>
- Contract grazing can take so many different forms that it opens up a whole new world of opportunities: grazing of crop residue, grazing to control invasive species, grazing of cover crops, grazing under solar installations - the list goes on. The Working Group promotes the concept as a low-cost entry point for beginning farmers.
<https://greenlandsbluwaters.org/midwest-perennial-forage-working-group/#contract-grazing>

- Dairy grazing. The Working Group used Risk Management Agency funding in 2017-18 to collect financial records from dairy graziers in the GLBW region. Kent Solberg, formerly with Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota, participated as one of the data collectors. Six years later, he said he still uses the data on a weekly basis.
<https://greenlandsbluewaters.org/midwest-perennial-forage-working-group/#dairy-grazing>
- Soil carbon. The 2019 Green Lands Blue Waters Conference in Minneapolis, MN included a presentation and discussion session on soil carbon and grazing, organized by the Working Group. Those events prompted Elisabeth Spratt of the Pasture Project to begin writing a journal article that was published in the January/February 2021 issue of Journal of Soil and Water Conservation: [Accelerating regenerative grazing to tackle farm, environmental, and societal challenges in the upper Midwest](#). The paper won the Editor's Choice award for 2021.
- Livestock & Crop Integration. Working Group discussions in 2019-2020 were beginning to focus more sharply on integration of livestock with row crops as a strategy for increasing grazing and forage in heavily row-cropped areas. In 2021, the Working Group was awarded a SARE Research & Education grant to conduct the "Match Made in Heaven: Livestock + Crops" project:
<https://greenlandsbluewaters.org/match-made-in-heaven-livestock-crops/>

Match Made in Heaven is ongoing, co-led by Laura Paine and Jane Jewett. It includes a 6-state survey of crop and livestock farmers to find out their attitudes and interests around integrating livestock with crops, including forms of integration other than grazing. While the group's heart is always with grazing, members have long recognized that other strategies for getting livestock distributed on the landscape can be a stepping stone to more perennial forage.

We are also doing deeper-dive case studies of selected integrated crop and livestock farmers, with an eye toward developing enterprise budgets that will engage farmer and lender interest in integrated crop and livestock systems.

If you're interested in these ideas, we'd love to have your thoughts! There is still a year left in the [Match Made in Heaven project](#), and we will hold quarterly meetings of the project advisory team in 2024. Contact project coordinator extraordinaire, Amy Fenn, to sign up: fennsfolly@gmail.com