

John Anderson, Livestock Economist for the American Farm Bureau Federation, discussed what he calls a new era of higher production costs, changing patterns of global growth and increasing competition for export markets. Using charts, Anderson showed how feed costs escalated to a peak in 2006 and then projected how they will rise even higher in 2010/2011. Heads nodded in the audience, as attendees validated what they’ve already experienced. As Anderson pointed out, this is due to strong global demand – for ethanol production in the US as well as increased feed demand in the developing countries, which are seeing more meat and dairy consumption, because as incomes rise, so do variations in their diets.

Anderson summed up that “the potential for growth in the export market may necessitate changes in productivity and management, (which) ultimately puts pressure on animal identification and traceability in the more local farms and feedlot facilities. He suggested more efficient use of forage, focusing on value and quality, as well as consistency, packaging and convenience.

Dr. Fred Provenza, Professor Emeritus in the Department of Wildland Resources at Utah State University presented us many concepts, reminding us most of all how our health is connected to the soils in which our food is grown. His theme is about the web of life - the interconnectivity and natural flow of events of everything on the planet. Provenza showed us how a “bio diverse diet enhances nutrition and health, also reduces costs.” Animals can be trained to eat certain forages by successive grazing through various pastures and paddocks, giving them (cattle, sheep, goats, etc) the less quality foodstuff and then move them to a better tasting area.

Provenza taught us that learning about diet starts in utero, because a mother’s milk is flavored by what she is eating. This includes cattle, sheep, insects, birds , fish as much as it does to humans. He said a "mother’s diet has a lifelong influence, including habitat preference, because wherever mom goes, she influences her offspring.”

Ultimately, Provenza concludes that “Each person has to take responsibility for living in ways that nurture their health and that of their families and that of landscapes that sustain all life,” because in the web of life, we are all connected.

Each speaker basically spoke about food - whether the handling of the animals we eat, or what the animals eat, what we eat, as well as an overview of the worldwide outlook. Although we were there to learn about cattle, we learned a lot about ourselves as well. These are “Essential Topics in Agriculture: What Farmers Need to Know.”

*Desy Campbell lives on her family farm, Croftburn Farm, in Culpeper, Virginia where they specialize in hormone-free and antibiotic –free beef and lamb. Although she enjoys raking hay, amongst other farm duties, writing about agriculture is her passion.*



Robert Shoemaker (left) and Carl Stafford (right) accompanied Temple Gradin and Fred Provenza (center) as they traveled between conferences.



More than 400 attendees packed into the Weyer’s Cave Community Center for this year’s Winter Forage Conference.



Alan Spivey of the Virginia Cattlemen’s Association presented conference speakers with a book highlighting the history of beef cattle production in Virginia.

**Robert M. Pollok, Jr. Recognized as 2011 VFGC Outstanding Forge Producer of the Year**

By: David Fiske

Robert M. Pollok, Jr. of Hill View Farm in Danville, Virginia has been recognized as the Virginia Forage and Grassland Council’s “Outstanding Forage Producer of the Year” for 2011. This statewide award is given annually by the VFGC and recognizes a producer that has implemented innovative forage management practices leading to enhanced production, forage quality, and profitability, better wildlife habitat, and improved soil conservation and water quality on their operation. This award is sponsored by Evergreen Seed Company, Rice, Virginia. Evergreen Seed graciously awards the winner a \$500 cash award. Mr. Pollock was nominated for the award by Jamie Stowe, Extension Agent, Pittsylvania County.

Mr. Pollok and his wife operate a 630 acre diversified livestock and crop operation ten miles from the City of Danville and are the third generation to operate the family farm. He runs 100 brood cows, has a commercial hay production enterprise catering to the local horse industry, and is a Virginia Certified Seed producer.



Mr. Pollok utilizes rotational grazing on his operation and has taken advantage of NRCS cost-share programs to install watering systems and over 2100 feet of waterline in his rotational paddocks. Over the last ten years, he has installed over 11,000 feet of high-tensile fencing to exclude animals from streams and ponds and created wooded riparian areas to enhance water quality and wildlife habitat. Due to his outstanding conservation efforts, he was recognized as the Pittsylvania County Soil and Water Conservation District’s 2007 Cooperator of the Year.

Congratulations to Robert M. Pollok, Jr., Hill View Farm, Danville, Virginia for being recognized as the Virginia Forage and Grassland Council 2011 Outstanding Forage Producer of the Year.

*David Fiske is the superintendent of the Shenandoah Valley Research and Extension Center and is also the Treasurer of the Virginia Forage and Grassland Council.*

*From front page Sapp*  
later became Gallagher USA. At Gallagher, he was responsible for bringing New Zealand based fencing technology to the eastern United States. At one time, he served all states east of the Mississippi River. He retired from Gallagher in 2007 and worked briefly in real estate, before beginning with Stay-Tuff Fencing.

Throughout his long career, Lewis has given producers the tools that they needed to implement controlled grazing, namely high tensile and temporary electric fencing, and now fixed knot high tensile fencing. Along with these tools he has also freely shared his knowledge and years of practical experience. He continues to share this knowledge as one of the primary instructors for the Virginia Forage and Grassland Council’s fencing schools (see article in this issue of the Forager). Lewis has dedicated weeks at time traveling around Virginia helping with these schools. On behalf of the Virginia forage and Grassland Council, I would like to express a sincere thanks to Lewis for his years of dedicated service to the forage and livestock industry in both Virginia and North Carolina.

Lewis resides outside of Winston-Salem, NC with his wife Katrina. They will have been 25 years this year. He has two daughters, Kelsey, 23 years old who is working on her master’s degree at Appalachian State University and Tayler, 21 years old, who is finishing her nursing degree at University of North Carolina Wilmington.

*To learn more about the Virginia Forage and Grassland Council’s Fencing Schools, please see the article in this issue of the Virginia Forager or visit our website at [www.vaforges.org](http://www.vaforges.org).*



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How are Pasture and Hay connected to the Health of the Horse?

Find out at the 2011 Equine Winter Forage Conference!

By: Shea Porr, PhD

Registration is now open for the Virginia Forage and Grassland Council/Virginia Cooperative Extension 2011 Equine Winter Conference being held on Saturday, March 12, 2011. Speakers from Virginia and Maryland will discuss topics on pasture and hay management and how that relates to horse health and well-being.

Speakers include **Dr. Harold McKenzie** from the Marion duPont Scott Equine Medical Center. Dr. McKenzie will discuss the latest discoveries concerning parasite management, including the developing resistance to ivermectin, and will clarify some of the misunderstandings about Equine Metabolic Syndrome. **Mike Spitzer**, journeyman farrier with Virginia Farrier Services, Inc., will review hoof care and management with references to common lameness issues involving the equine foot.



Also on the agenda is **Dr. Blair Meldrum**, with the Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine. Dr. Meldrum will discuss toxic plants common in Virginia, including on how to recognize and prevent poisonings. Also, **Dr. Les Vough** from the University of Maryland will discuss hay selection for horses and will provide a hands-on demonstration with several varieties and qualities of hay. Virginia Cooperative Extension agent **Watson Lawrence** will present strategies to prevent weed growth in horse pastures, and **Dr. Shea Porr**, Assistant Professor at the Virginia Tech MARE Center, will present information on managing the health of the horse while on pasture, including controlling weight and managing horses who have foundered.

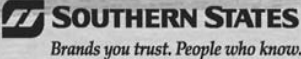
The conference will be held at the Jolliff Middle School located at 1021 Jolliff Road in Chesapeake, Virginia. Early registration (postmarked by February 26, 2011) is \$25.00; registration at the door will be \$35.00. Registration opens at 8:30 am, with the program running until 4:00 pm. Lunch and program materials are included with the registration fee. For more information, contact Dr. Shea Porr at [cporr@vt.edu](mailto:cporr@vt.edu) or 540-687-3521 ext 27. The registration form may be downloaded at [www.vaforages.org](http://www.vaforages.org)

*Shea Porr is the Superintendent of Virginia Tech's MARE Center and is also on the VFGC Board.*

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#### 2011 Fencing School

March 22, 2011  
Southern Piedmont AREC  
Blackstone, VA 23824  
March 24, 2011  
Brightwood, VA  
March 31, 2011  
Broadway, VA  
April 19, 2011  
Middleburg, VA  
<http://www.vaforages.org>

#### Virginia Beef Expo

April 15-17, 2011  
Harrisonburg, VA  
<http://www.vabeefexpo.org/>

#### AFGC Annual Meeting

June 15-15, 2011  
French Lick Resort  
French Lick, IN  
<http://www.afgc.org/events.html>



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To JOIN the Virginia Forage and Grassland Council a membership form can be found on the web at <http://vaforages.org> - Contact Margaret Kenny at [makenny@vt.edu](mailto:makenny@vt.edu) or call 434-292-5331



Deutsch Receives Extension Award  
From Virginia Agribusiness Council

Richmond, Virginia – Dr. Chris Teutsch, an Extension Specialist at the Southern Piedmont Agricultural Research and Extension Center in Blackstone, has been awarded the Virginia Agribusiness Council’s 2011 Outstanding Extension Service Award. Jim Saunders, of Saunders Brothers, Inc., and Dr. Dan Brann of Brann Farms, both Council Board members, presented Dr. Teutsch with his award on January 19 during the Virginia Forage and Grassland Council’s Winter Forage Conference in Madison Heights.



Dr. Teutsch, a graduate of Ohio State University and the University of Kentucky, came to Virginia in 2000 to begin his work as the state’s forage specialist. Over the past decade, his research on forage production, grazing systems, and improved pasture management has offered valuable educational resources to livestock and equine producers. His statewide pasture management research and extension efforts have been important in all corners of the Commonwealth, not only in his local region of Southside Virginia.

Dr. Teutsch is credited with assisting farmers’ transition from tobacco to other forms of agriculture. In addition to livestock, he has focused on pasture management for horses, helping to host a series of workshops to assist equine owners in better managing their pastures and addressing environmental concerns. Dr. Teutsch is also active in assisting in coordinating conferences, including the 2009 Mid-Atlantic Grass Finished Livestock Conference and winter forage meetings and conferences, in cooperation with Virginia Cattlemen’s Association and the Virginia Forage and Grassland Council and other groups.

During the presentation, Mr. Saunders stated, “He is responsible for much of the forage research that is so extremely valuable to Virginia cattle producers, and without his efforts, much of the work would not exist. Dr. Teutsch is the ‘working man’s’ specialist, is easy to understand, and communicates things well to his audience.”

Dr. Brann went on to note, “Dr. Teutsch is a great example of someone who integrates all facets of extension into his job – agents, industry members, students, other researchers, and faculty. We are pleased to recognize him with the Council’s 2011 Extension Specialist Award.”

The Virginia Agribusiness Council represents agricultural and forestry producers, suppliers, marketers, processors and commodity associations in the Commonwealth with a unified voice through its government affairs activities. The Council has a combined membership of over 40,000. For more information on the Virginia Agribusiness Council, visit [www.va-agribusiness.org](http://www.va-agribusiness.org).

New Program Offers Free Nitrogen to Virginia’s  
Livestock Producers

By: Chris Teutsch

Boy wouldn’t that be a great cost share program! Well it almost exists; all we have to do is manage for legumes in our pastures. Legumes are an essential part of a strong and healthy nitrogen cycle in grasslands. In many cases they come by themselves when we start to manage for them, but in some instances, we need to introduce them back into our pastures. That isn’t all bad since we can choose improved varieties that are higher producing and in some cases more persistent. There are a few steps that we can take that will help to ensure that our frost seedings are successful:

**Control Broadleaf Weeds.** Broadleaf weeds must be controlled prior to seeding legumes. This is best accomplished by controlling weeds the season prior to renovation.

**Soil Test and Adjust Fertility.** In order for pasture renovation to be successful proper soil fertility is required. Lime and fertilize pastures according to soil test results. Lime should be applied six months prior to renovation if possible.

**Suppress Sod and Decrease Residue.** The existing sod must be suppressed and plant residue reduced prior to seeding. The reduction in plat residue facilitates good soil-seed contact. This can be accomplished by hard grazing in late fall and early winter.

**Ensure Good Soil-Seed Contact.** Regardless of what seeding method is chosen, good soil-seed contact is required for seed germination and emergence.

**Seed on Proper Date.** Frost seeding or drilling legumes back into pastures is usually best accomplished in late winter or early spring (February and early March). Frost seeding is accomplished by simply broadcasting the seed on the soil surface and allowing the freezing and thawing cycles to incorporate the seed into the soil. Success with frost seeding can be enhanced by dragging your pasture after or as you broadcast the seed. This simply gets the seed in better contact with the soil. Prior planning and preparation are important so that seeding can be done in a timely manner.

**Use High-Quality Seed of an Adapted Species.** Choose forage species that are adapted to the area and end use. Use either certified or proprietary seed to ensure high germination, seed genetics, and low noxious weed content. Cheap, low quality seed often cost more in the end due to lower production and thin stands. In Virginia, a good mixture for renovating pastures with is 4-6 lb red clover, 1-2 lbs of ladino or grazing white clover, and 10-15 lb of annual lespedeza per acre.

**Use correct seeding rate.** Calibrate your seeder prior to planting (see box on calibrating forage seeding equipment). Seeding at too high of a rate needlessly results in higher seed costs. On the other hand seeding at too low a rate results in weak stands and lower productivity.

**Inoculate Legume Seed.** Always use inoculated legume seed or inoculate it with the proper strain of nitrogen fixing bacteria



See Free Nitrogen page 9



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**Free Nitrogen from page 4**  
prior to seeding. This is relatively inexpensive insurance that legume roots will be well nodulated and efficient nitrogen fixation will take place.

**Control Seeding Depth.** Small seeded forages should never be placed deeper than ½ inch. When using a drill always check seeding depth since it will vary with seedbed condition and soil moisture status. Placing small seeded forages too deep will results in stand failures.

**Check seed distribution pattern.** When using a spinner type spreader/seeder make sure and check you spreading pattern. In many cases small seeded forages are not thrown as far as fertilizer. This can result is strips of clover in your pastures rather than a uniform stand. Also check your seed distribution pattern. Single disk spinners often throw more seed to one side if not correctly adjusted.

**Control Post-Seeding Competition.** Failure to control post-seeding competition is one of the most common causes of stand failures. Clip or graze the existing vegetation to a height just above the developing seedlings. This must be done in a timely manner to ensure that the competing vegetation does not get ahead of the seedlings.

**Pray for rain.** Lastly and most importantly pray for rain. We can do everything just right, but if it doesn’t rain success will be unlikely.

*Chris Teutsch works at Virginia Tech’s Southern Piedmont Research Station located near Blackstone, VA and resides on a small farm in Dinwiddie County with his wife, Angie and their four children.*

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Honoring Dr. White’s Years of Service Page 9

The Virginia Forage and Grassland Council seeks your assistance in honoring the life of Dr. Harlan E. White. The Dr. Harlan E. White Memorial Scholarship Fund has been established by the Virginia Forage and Grassland Council and will be used for scholarships, education, research, and other activities related to the promotion and better understanding of the forage industry.

Dr. White dedicated his life to Virginia’s forage industry. It is now time for us, the recipients of these good works, to dedicate ourselves and share some of the great gifts that Harlan bestowed upon us.

Dr. White’s career was long and distinguished. He joined the Virginia Tech Agronomy Department in 1966 as an Extension Forage Specialist. In 1979, he was the driving force behind the formation of the Virginia Forage and Grassland Council which has grown to become a major voice for the forage and livestock industries in Virginia.

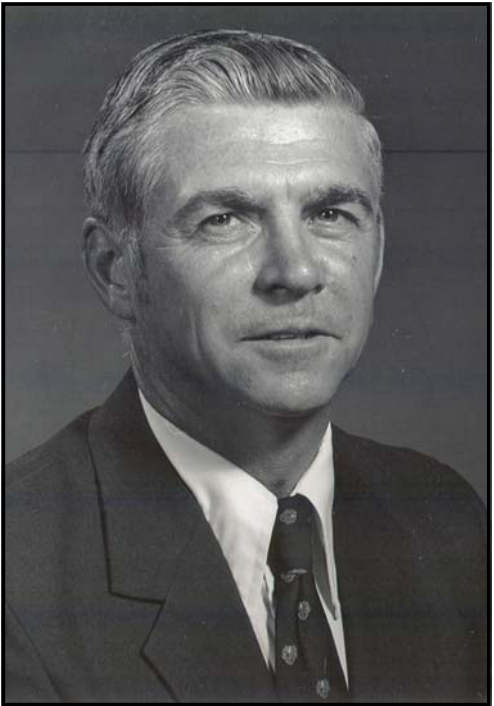
Harlan was a recipient of many state and national awards recognizing his educational programs directed at improving the well-being of forage producers and their support industries. His work was always a cooperative effort partnering with individuals interested in improving forage production and utilization. His dedication to service and education was recognized by the Virginia Forage and Grassland Council (VFGC) when he was awarded the Medallion Award. His dedication to the forage industry continued throughout his retirement years by serving as both treasurer and advisor to the VFGC.

The Virginia Forage and Grassland Council is accepting funds from corporate and individual donors that wish to honor Dr. White. The goal is to establish a permanent endowment to provide scholarships to support Virginia forage education and research. VFGC has an ambitious plan to raise \$50,000 by 2013, and \$500,000 by 2015. The fund will be managed and administered by the Virginia Forage and Grassland Council Board of Directors. All funds will be audited on an annual basis and shall be dedicated to the sole purpose of the Scholarship Fund.

We are asking for your financial support in this endeavor and welcome all donations in any amount. The following categories will be recognized.

- Platinum Medallion, \$10,000 or more;
- Gold Medallion, \$1,000 - 10,000;
- Silver Medallion, \$500 - \$1000;
- Bronze Medallion, \$100 - \$500;
- and Friends of the Fund, under \$100.

A donation form may be found at [www.vaforges.org](http://www.vaforges.org)





Initial Results from the Mid-Atlantic Orchardgrass Survey

By: Ben Tracy

Growers across the Mid-Atlantic region have experienced problems with orchardgrass stands in recent years. Reduced forage yield, fewer hay harvests each year and premature death of orchardgrass stands have been reported and confirmed in University sponsored forage variety trials. Estimates suggest lower orchardgrass yields and premature death of stands may be costing hay producers over \$90 million a year. With the help of Extension agents in Virginia and other neighboring states, I organized a survey to help answer questions about this orchardgrass problem and perhaps find the path to a solution.

The survey contained 28 questions that covered a wide range of issues. Data were entered on-line by agents who interviewed growers – usually in the field. Soil samples from many fields were collected and analyzed for standard soil nutrients. By the end of 2010, 43 orchardgrass fields had been surveyed across 4 states and 22 counties. Below is a summary of the more significant findings:

- 74% felt their stands had declined faster than expected.
- 64% of the problem fields were planted in last 5 years.
- 53% harvest hay twice per year, 30% harvest three times each year.
- 86% cut stands to the recommended 3-4 inch stubble height.
- 63% reported no visible insect or disease problems.
- 86% apply nitrogen fertilizer every year.
- 79% had a soil test done within last 3 yr.
- P and K ratings for most fields were in the Low to Medium range.
- Cultivar type appeared unrelated to poor stand persistence.

Overall, most growers reported poor stand persistence and these included seemingly well-managed stands. None of the individual variables surveyed (e.g., pests, disease, cutting management, soil fertility) were well correlated with poor orchardgrass persistence.

So what might have caused these orchardgrass problems? Well, the evidence probably points to a combination of factors, and I suspect a major player was climate. For example, from June 2007 to April 2008, approximately 90% of Virginia was under drought. Drought conditions also were widespread in 2006, 2008 and 2009 but for shorter duration. Moreover, since 1960 mean air temperature has increased by 0.3 deg F each decade. Warmer temperatures and periodic droughts surely stressed many orchardgrass stands in recent years. When combined with other issues, like low soil fertility, these environmental stressors probably contributed to many problems observed by growers. If this climate hypothesis is correct and temperatures continue to rise, as they have been, growers in Virginia might consider switching to more stress tolerant forage species (e.g., novel, tall fescue varieties) to replace declining orchardgrass stands.

Ben Tracy is grassland ecosystems management specialist at Virginia Tech and is also on the VFGC Board.



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We also include Floral Identification - because it can be definitive and can sometimes greatly simplify the identification process. The hundreds of color photographs and other illustrations are intended to help with these determinations. The book covers 23 forage legumes, 61 grasses and more than 100 non leguminous forbs found in pastures and grasslands of Eastern US.

Besides identification of important species, we describe other key characteristics such as adaptation, favorable and unfavorable soil types, seasonal growth patterns, toxicity, etc. For plants harvested for hay or silage or by grazing, we discuss cutting and grazing management, quality factors, and potential yields.

Because of its organization and content, this book should be a valuable reference for farmers and farm advisors, teachers and students of agronomy, or for anyone interested in the dynamic relationship between plants and agriculture.





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VFGC to Hold Fencing Schools

The Virginia Forage and Grassland Council will again this spring be holding four producer fencing schools. The dates and locations are:

**March 22** – Brightwood Ruritan Hall (Madison County),  
Contact person: Brad Jarvis, (Brad Jarvis (540) 672-5408)

**March 24** –Southern Piedmont AREC, Blackstone, VA  
Contact person: Chris Teutsch (434) 292-5331

**March 31** – Tenth Legion / Mt.Valley Ruritan Hall, Broadway, VA  
Contact person: Richard Fitzgerald (540) 248-6218 extension 105

**April 19** – Middleburg AREC, Middleburg, VA  
Contact person: Shea Porr (540) 687-5362

The schools will feature all fencing systems, with special emphasis on electrified smooth wire high tensile fencing and high tensile fixed knot woven wire fencing. The instructors for these schools have over 75 years of combined fencing experience and include Lewis Sapp of Stay-Tuff Fence Manufacturing, Lee Ellsworth of Gallagher USA, and Rusty Tanner of Tanner’s Fencing.

The morning classroom session will include fencing economics, fence types for various livestock classes, cross fences and perimeter fences, brace construction, and fencing design and layout. The afternoon session will be a hands-on session where participants will receive training on constructing braces, tying high tensile fence knots & splices, fence charger installation, and construction of smooth wire and fixed knot high tensile fencing. The fencing school at the Middleburg AREC will focus on equine fencing while the other two locations will focus primarily on cattle and sheep fencing.



If you are interested in participating make sure to sign up early because space is limited to 30 participants per location and they typically fill up fast. The fencing school agenda and registration form can be found on the Virginia Forage & Grassland Council website at [www.vafortages.org](http://www.vafortages.org). For questions or more information, contact Margaret Kenny at 434-292-5331 or makenny@vt.edu.

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President’s Message



I hope you were able to attend the Winter Conferences this year. What a great program it was with Temple Grandin, Fred Provenza, and John Anderson! I apologize to the many people who could not attend because all locations sold out. However we hope to have DVDs (PC computer) of the entire program for sale by the middle of February. I want to thank the entire Board, Margaret Kenny, all the Extension Agents and helpers at each location, and all the Sponsors, who helped us put this on. The results of the evaluation forms showed that it was successful and all the hard work paid off.

I also want to encourage everyone to consider contributing to the Harlan White Memorial Scholar ship Fund. Harlan had the foresight too see the benefit of helping form the VFGC in 1979 and through his hard work over the years, VFGC has grown to be a major voice in the livestock and forage industry and to put on excellent educational programs too benefit Farmers in Virginia, today.

I want to welcome the new board members who have agreed to serve on the VFGC Board and we look forward to your input and service. To the Board members going off, thank you for your many hours of time spent in helping us move forward. In closing, if you are not a member, please consider supporting this organization so we can continue to bring beneficial programs and be a strong voice for the forage industry and farmers in Virginia in the future. Best wishes for a most productive Spring.

Best Regards,  
E. N. Garnett.  
President, VFGC

Chris’s Corner

Wow! What a winter conference! We sold out every location and had over 1100 participants. The best part of the conference was the number of young people in the audience. There is nothing that I like more than seeing youth at agricultural meetings. They are our future and each and every member of the VFGC needs to encourage their love for agriculture. I want to thank everyone who helped out with the meetings. They ran like a well oiled machine. The only problem with this year’s conference is that it is going to be very difficult to top it next year. Unfortunately I think we may have set the bar too high.

Well there is certainly a lot of volatility in the fertilizer market right now and the best way to fight this volatility in cow-calf systems is to build stronger nutrient cycles in our pastures. Once we build up P and K in pastures, removal is relatively small. A cow-calf pair will remove around 7 lb of phosphate, < 1 lb of potash, and around 10 of nitrogen annually. If you are stocked at 2 acres per cow-calf then you are looking at removal of 3.5 lb of phosphate/acre, 0.5 lb potash/acre, and 5 lb nitrogen /acre. The point that I want to make is that producers with well managed grazing systems and who work to incorporate legumes into pastures can really isolate themselves from large fluctuations in fertilizer price. And that brings us to an important time of the year. You guessed it, it’s time to start frost-seeding clover. In this issue of the Forager you will find my standard list of things that you can do to help enhance your success with frost seeding.

One of the key practices to maintain and build strong nutrient cycles in pastures is grazing management. While livestock remove only small quantities of nutrients, they can redistribute nutrients within grazing systems. In large continuously grazed pastures, livestock will tend to concentrate nutrients around water and shade areas. The key to maintaining an even distribution of nutrients in grazing systems is to subdivide larger pastures and implement controlled grazing. The smaller the paddock the more uniform dung and urine distribution will be. Fencing is an important component of improved grazing systems and if you are going to spend the money and effort to put it up, then you might as well do it right. This spring the VFGC will be holding another set of fencing schools taught by Lewis Sapp of Stay Tuff Fencing and Lee Ellsworth of Gallagher. I don’t want to be boastful, but these are one of the best fencing schools in the entire southeastern U.S. Each school has a limited number of spots. So if you are interested, make sure and sign up early.

I want to make sure to congratulate our award winners for this year. Mr. Robert Pollock of Danville, VA was the VFGC’s 2010 Forage Producer of the Year. What impressed me the most about Mr. Pollock’s farming operation was not one single enterprise, but rather how all of the enterprises, grain, certified seed, hay, and cattle, came together to result in a sustainable farming system. It seems that we have gotten away from diversity in agricultural operations and I think that has resulted in farms that are less robust in these tumultuous economic times. The second award winner was Lewis Sapp of Stay Tuff Fencing who received the Harlan White Distinguished Service Award. Lewis has been serving livestock producers in Virginia and North Carolina for more than 30 years by giving them the tools that they need to implement controlled grazing systems in the form of simple and functional fencing systems to control livestock. He has also served as the primary instructor for the VFGC fencing schools.

I would also like to thank all of our corporate sponsors, winter conference sponsors, and fencing school sponsors. It is because of these businesses, agencies, and individuals that we are able to deliver high quality educational programs at a very reasonable cost. Lastly, I would like to extend a special thank you to Evergreen Seed Company for sponsoring the \$500 cash award that was presented to our Forage Producer of the Year recipient at the Madison Heights Conference.

It was truly a pleasure visiting with many of you at this winter’s forage conferences and I am looking forward to seeing you at the upcoming fencing schools and summer tours. Until then I wish everyone a long and warm spring with plenty of rain.

Chris D. Teutsch  
Forage Research and Extension



Why Many Virginia Farms Will Be Abandoned in the Years Ahead

By Tom Stanley

Most people driving down any of Virginia's rural by-ways would be startled to see cattle in the road and the serious risk escaped cattle on the public roads present can hardly be understated. The alarming title of this article is intended to draw the reader's attention in the same way.

Fences have been an issue of concern for Virginia agriculture since colonial times. This article will explain why I believe issues related to farm fencing could lead to the abandonment of many Virginia farms.

Most agriculture in Central and Western Virginia transitioned away from small general livestock and crop farms toward more land extensive cattle grazing during the last half of the 20th century. The availability of relatively inexpensive fence wire was one factor that made this possible. Today, many of the fences that encircle Virginia's pastures are composed of materials put in place as far back as the 1950's. Since the time that these fences were installed, the cost of fence materials relative to the value of the pasture's product (i.e. cattle) has soared. Today, fences represent one of the most costly fixed investments for a livestock farm. New fencing, depending on type of fence and terrain, will cost a working commercial farm anywhere from \$1.50 to \$6.00 per linear foot. In the past seven years alone, the price of woven wire has jumped 75%.

To put this increase in perspective, suppose a land owner is planning to put all new fencing on 100 acres of pasture. Suppose the landowner chooses an inexpensive type of fence and the total cost of the new fence including labor will be \$2.50 / linear foot. If the 100 acres is to have a whole new perimeter and be split into four pastures in the simplest arrangement possible, the owner is looking at an investment of well over \$31,000.

As people left farming and rented their land to neighboring farmers, the once well maintained fences were neglected. Ask any farmer who depends on rented land, and they will most likely tell you fences are the most worrisome problem with rented farmland. Two reasons explain/address why fences on so much Virginia pastureland have been allowed to decline.

First, many farms rental arrangements are simple verbal agreements renewed annually. Since fences are expensive and have a useful life of at least 15 years, farmer-tenants have been very hesitant to invest a great deal of time and effort into maintaining fences on rented land that they were not sure they would have access to in the years ahead. Second, profit margins in agriculture have steadily narrowed over the past 35 years and less cash has been available to invest in fixed investments like fencing. Landlords have tended to focus on the periodic check they could get from a farmer-tenant and not what was happening to their fences. Too often, I hear from landowners “I’ll just rent it out for someone to make hay”. Ultimately, something has to eat all that hay! Financial analysis tells us those cow/calf operations that are able to maximize the use of grazing land and minimize hay feeding are consistently the most profitable and sustainable.

The cattle market has seen some unprecedented high prices over the past year. There are good prospects for a profitable cow/calf sector the next few years. Now is the time for landowners and their cattle-producer tenants to sit-down and formulate plans to maintain, refurbish, or replace fences as needed this year and in the future. Landowners must recognize the long term enhancements well maintained fencing can bring to their property.

I contend that significant portions of Virginia pasture that are now rented for grazing are at risk of being abandoned. Farmer-tenants are currently willing to 'make-do' on rented land with poor fences, but as costs spiral upward, many of these farmer tenants will throw-up their hands and sell cattle rather than endure the headaches and liability of escaped animals. Without properly fenced pastures the Virginia pastoral landscape we and visitors to our Commonwealth enjoy will experience further encroachment of unsightly woody invasive weeds and diminished economic vitality in rural communities.

If you are a farmer-tenant or a landlord, I recommend the following steps to prevent the decline and possible abandonment of a rented farm.

1. Develop a written lease that has a provision for the farmer-tenant to keep the lease for multiple years.
2. Depending on the relative rental rate for the farm, I think it is good if the landlord agrees to provide fencing materials up to a certain value each year with an understanding they will be used in a manner consistent with the mutual goals of the landowner and the farmer-tenant.
3. Both landlord and tenant need to mutually agree what is expected in the way of fence and pasture maintenance and put it in writing. Ideally, at least once per year both the landlord and the tenant should inspect all parts of the farm together.

There are now and will continue to be profitable farming operations in Virginia. The farms that are profitable and well maintained in the future will be so because of the commitment of all parties, landowners and farmer-tenants, to the care of all the fixed assets of the farm, including its fences.

Tom Stanley, Virginia Cooperative Extension Agent, Farm Business Management, Northern District



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## "Grandin, Provenza, and Anderson" Available on DVD

This winter's *Virginia Forage and Grassland Council's Winter Forage Conferences* were well attended with more than 1,100 people participating. Speakers include Temple Grandin, Fred Provenza, and John Anderson. Topics covered at this winter's conferences included animal handling and welfare, grazing behavior and nutrition, and the impact of global economics on livestock agriculture in the U.S. If you missed this meeting don't despair, we were able to capture all of the presentations as Camtasia videos and they along with handouts and an electronic copy of the proceedings are available on DVD. All you need to do is to slip the DVD into your personal computer and click on the talk you would like to hear or the handout you would like to view. For more information on purchasing a DVD from this year's or past year's winter conferences, please visit our web page at [www.vaforges.org](http://www.vaforges.org) or contact Margaret Kenny at 434-292-5331 or [makenny@vt.edu](mailto:makenny@vt.edu).

## PUBLISHER'S NOTICE

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THE

# VIRGINIA FORAGER

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## Record Crowd Attends VFGC Winter Forage Conferences

By: Desy Campbell

2011 Winter Forage Conferences, held across Virginia in mid-January, were definitely over the top, a record breaking 1100 people attended at one of the three locations: Wytheville, Lynchburg, or Weyer's Cave. Over 100 college and high school students attended the Weyer's Cave meeting. The agenda was the same at each location.

Keynote speaker Temple Grandin, the expert in animal behavior, enraptured the audiences about her cow's eye approach to animal handling. Fred Provenza, opened our minds about the necessity of varied diet and landscape and how everything is interconnected. Jon Anderson gave us the economic picture, pointing to the new reality for agriculture's role in feeding the world.

Temple Grandin, well known in animal science and behavior circles as much as being "an autism self-advocate", gave us the low-down, common-sense approach to handling cattle. Whether moving herds from field to field, or through the chute for veterinary procedures, or for the trip to market and ultimately the kill pen, Grandin's end goal is reducing animal stress and improving animal welfare.

Because of her autism, Grandin utilized her skills and knowledge to figure out what exactly cows were seeing while in the chute: she got down to their eyelevel and went



through on hands and knees, noting where the light was bright, casting shadows. She found the scary objects (yellow colored ladders and yellow clothing particularly), white objects, dangling chains, reflecting objects, bare bright light bulbs. She has a long list of things that producers can do to clean up their working area in an effort to eliminate stress the cows from an already stressful situation. Relating observations and examples, Grandin kept on task informing the audiences about her unique perspective. Thinking in pictures is the way her brain operates, just like many animals - cattle, horses, included. Down to earth, Grandin held the audience in her sight while she related her experiences.

*See page 6*

## Lewis Sapp Receives Harlan White Distinguished Service Award

By: Chris Teutsch

Lewis Sapp of Stay-Tuff Fence was the 2011 recipient of the Harlan White Distinguished Service Award. This award is named in memory of Dr. Harlan White, former Forage Extension Specialist at Virginia Tech. Dr. White was a true extension educator that possessed a unique ability to translate scientific information into a form that producers in the field could understand and implement on their farms. Our 2011 recipient possesses many of those same characteristics.

Lewis is a graduate of North Carolina State University where he majored in turf grass management. Following college



he spent almost a decade in the western United States working as a ranch manager and hunting guide. In 1980, Lewis returned to North Carolina and began working for Snell Systems which

*See Sapp page 7*

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Reporting the progress of Virginia's forage industry