Kathy Voth of Livestock for Landscapes to Speak at the 2012 Winter Forage Conferences

Integrated Weed Management: Putting Science into Practice

By Gordon Groover

Integrated Weed Management: Putting Science into Practice is the theme for the Virginia Forage and Grassland Council (VFGC) and Virginia Cooperative Extension winter forage conferences. This is an ideal opportunity for all livestock producers to gain an understanding of how to profitably integrate science and practice to manage weeds in pastures and hay land by smartly managing livestock, soil fertility, and herbicides.

This year’s keynote speaker is Kathy Voth of Livestock for Landscapes a national known expert on using livestock as a land management tool. Using decades of university research and practical hands-on experience, she invented a process for teaching cows to eat weeds and non-traditional forages. Ms. Voth makes use of livestock’s natural behavior as an inexpensive alternative for managing weeds and other vegetation in pastures and other landscapes.

Participants will also hear from two Virginia Tech Extension Specialist Scott Hagood, Professor of Weed Science and Chris Teutsch, Assoc Professor of Forage Management. Dr. Hagood will provide farmers with knowledge of the practical science behind developing a weed management. Dr. Teutsch will help farmers understand the relationships between soils and weeds, with insights on how to use fertility to shift the balance to favor of quality forages.

This year, VFGC will include local producers at each workshop to discuss how they balance grazing, re-establishment, mowing, and spraying to provide a quality forage for grazing and/or haymaking.

The daylong conference will be repeated at four locations:

- Tuesday, January 17, in Wytheville at the Wytheville Meeting Center.
- Wednesday, January 18, in Weyers Cave at the Weyers Cave Community Center.
- Friday, January 20, in Chatham, at the Olde Dominion Agricultural Complex.

The conferences will run from 8:30 am to 3:00 pm. Please visit the VFGC web site (http://vaforages.org) for additional details and registration information.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service is also a sponsor of this high quality educational program.

Gordon Groover is an Ag Economist at Virginia Tech and also serves on the VFGC board.

Program Registration

No refunds for cancellation after January 3, 2012

Name _______________________________ Name _______________________________
Address ___________________________________________ City State Zip
County____________________________________ Daytime Phone __________________________
Email________________________________________

Check which meeting you will attend:
- Wytheville Meeting Center
- Weyers Cave Community Center
- Gordonsville Vol. Fire Company
- Olde Dominion Agric. Complex

$35.00 early registration per attendee
$50.00 late registration per attendee

Student Registration $15.00 per student

Harlan White Scholarship Fund Amount $________

Early registration is to be post marked January 3, 2012

Make Check Payable to: VFGC

Mail Check and Registration to:
2012 Winter Forage Conference Margaret Kenny
3599 Indian Oak Road
Crewe, VA 23930

Integrated Weed Management: Putting Science into Practice

8:30 am Registration
9:00-10:15 Weed grazing: science and theory-Kathy Voth
10:15-10:45 Break - Visit Sponsors
10:45-11:45 Soil fertility and weed control - speaker – Chris Teutsch
11:45-12:00 VFGC Business Meeting – Robert Shoemaker
12:00 -1:00 Lunch —Visit Sponsors
1:00-1:15 Gaining Ground - J.B. Daniel, Forage & Grassland Agronomist, USDA-NRCS
1:15-1:45 Integrated weed management on my farm - Local Producer
1:45-2:45 Herbicides in an integrated weed control program-Scott Hagood
2:45 - 3:00 Weed grazing: putting science into practice-Kathy Voth
3:00 Adjourn

Directions

WYEVILLE MEETING CENTER
1000 E Main St., Wytheville, VA 24382
- From I-81 North (Bristol/Abingdon): Take Exit 72 to I-77 Exit 41.
- From I-81 South/1-77 North (Roanoke or Hillsville/Galax): Take Exit 72 to I-77 Exit 41.
- From I-77 South (Bluefield): Take Exit 41.
- Then, from all directions:
  - Peppers Ferry Road to
  - Community Boulevard, left turn in front of Comfort Suites.
  - For a map see:

OLDE DOMINION AGRICULTURAL COMPLEX
17903 US Hwy 29S, Chatham, VA 24531
- Travelling South from Lynchburg: travel approximately 42 miles on 29 South. Bypass the town of Greta and continue on 29 South. Just outside of Greta you will pass a large Shell gas station on the left and then travel approximately 1 mile and Olde Dominion Agricultural Complex will be on the right. If you get to the Chatham exits, turn around and come back.
- Travelling North from Danville: Travel approximately 22 miles. Bypass the town of Chatham, travel approximately 3 miles, pass the state police office on the left and the Olde Dominion Agricultural Complex will be just past it on the left.

GORDONSVILLE VOLUNTEER FIRE COMPANY
301 E. Baker Street, Gordonsville, VA 22942
- From the north and west: From the Gordonsville Circle (intersection of Routes 33, 15, and 231), take US 15/33 South. Turn left at East Baker Street (about 1/4 mile). The fire hall is 1/10 mile ahead on your right.
- From the south and east: Head north to Gordonsville on US 15/33. Pass under railroad, and take the third right, East Baker Street. The fire hall is 1/10 mile ahead on your right.

WEYERS CAVE COMMUNITY CENTER
682 Weyers Cave Road, Weyers Cave, VA 24486
- From Interstate 81, take exit 235 Travel east on Weyers Cave Road (Rt. 256) for approximately 1.5 miles.
- Weyers Cave Community Center will be on the left

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www.americalalfa.com
So why don’t we want to run 230 cows and wean a bunch of 344 lb calves? The answer is cost. We have much more cost tied up in those 230 cows than we do in the 130 cows. Logically, this makes sense. And this is the way we have to think if we are going to run our cattle enterprise as a business.

Now many of you are saying “How in the world am I going to graph the marginal value of stocking rate in my field?” I’m not sure that you have to. There are a few take home points that can better help you make stocking rate decisions. First, stop chasing biological numbers (weaning weights, preg rates, etc) and start chasing financial numbers. We always want the biggest calves, the most calves, etc. What we should want is the most money we can out of a given field. Second, the best spot to be profit wise is somewhere between the biggest calves and the most weight. If you find these two points (at least in your head) then you can start to think through roughly where the optimum is. I asked the two herdsmen on the farm to write down how many cows we put in Spitler before I showed them any of these charts. They both handed me pieces of paper that said 135. If we think through these principles, I think we can often come up with a number that is pretty close to what the math would tell us.

John Genho is the farm manager for Eldon Farms in Woodville, Virginia and also serves on the VFGC board.

Harlan E. White Scholarship Applications

The Harlan E. White Scholarship, established by the Virginia Forage and Grassland Council, for undergraduate students studying the promotion and better understanding of forages and grasslands in Virginia is now available for the first time. Applications are available on the Virginia Tech College of Agriculture and Life Sciences website, http://www.cas.vt.edu/undergrad/awards/scholarships/undergrad-scholarships-cas.html . Applications form open November 15 and close March 1 unless otherwise noted. Scholarships are awarded on academic year to students enrolled full-time (12 credit hours or more per semester) in the Department of Crop and Soil Environmental Sciences or in the Agricultural Technology Program. Please see the above website for details and additional requirements.

The Virginia Forage and Grassland Council continues to seek 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, like the one now available, however the fund needs to grow to offer more and larger scholarships.

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.

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 $500,000 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 – $9,999; Silver Medallion, $250 – $999; Bronze Medallion, $100 – $249; and Friends of the Fund, under $100.

Your contributions qualify as a charitable contribution because VFGC administers the Fund and is a 501 (c)(3) organization. Additional information and donation forms are available at the VFGC website, http://vaforages.org/scholarship/, and at VFGC meetings and conferences.

The Virginia Forage and Grassland Council invites donors to contribute to the Harlan E. White Scholarship Fund to honor the memory of Dr. Harlan E. White. For more information, please visit www.vaforages.org/scholarship/.
Grazing on Rosser Mountain

By: John Genho

Just south of County Rd 621 in Rappahannock County, VA sits a mountain called Rosser Mountain. And around that mountain is about 450 grazable acres divided into 6 different fields. I use the term grazable loosely here since much of the land is rocky and has shallow soils. But nevertheless, this is one of our rotations on Eldon Farms that we refer to as Spitter.

Over the past seven years, we have inadvertently run a sort of grazing experiment in Spitter that I believe is very informative. We have kept the acreage basically constant over these years, but we have varied the stocking rate extensively which leads to an interesting study on stocking rate. Since 2005 we have had as many as 260 cows and as few as 90 cows grazing in Spitter. This has led to a significant shift in output as shown by Table 1. So my question for each of you is as follows: Based on this data, how many cows would you run in Spitter?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Adjusted Wean Weight</th>
<th>Calves Weaned</th>
<th>Tons Calf Weaned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>38.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>441</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>34.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>423</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>34.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>505</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>35.9</td>
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<td>2009</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>508</td>
<td>127</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>524</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To start with, we may say we want to wean the heaviest calves possible. This makes sense. Bigger calves are better. When we look across the first row of Table 1, we see that the heaviest calves were weaned this year at 524 lbs each. (Note that these are age adjusted weaning weights to account for differences in weaning times). But then we start to look at the other rows and realize that we only weaned 86 calves in Spitter this year, which represents about a 40% decrease in total tons of calf that Spitter produced. At this point, we have to realize that weaning weight is not the best indicator of stocking rate.

So we may decide that maximizing total tons of calf weaned is that answer. Forget about weaning weight, let’s just pull as much weight as we can off a field. So we back up to 2005 when the calves only weighed 344 lbs each but we weaned 221 of them. However, there is something unsettling about weighing 344 lb calves. Something doesn’t seem right about this. So we dig a little deeper.

At this point, we really have to step back and think about what we are trying to maximize here. We can see that maximizing weaning weight just isn’t right. But should we be trying to maximize lbs calf weaned? The answer is definitely no. If we are raising cattle as a business, we should be trying to realize the most weight. This may not be the best indicator of stocking rate.

So we may decide that maximizing total tons of calf weaned is that answer. Forget about weaning weight, let’s just pull as much weight as we can off a field. So we back up to 2005 when the calves only weighed 344 lbs each but we weaned 221 of them. However, there is something unsettling about weighing 344 lb calves. Something doesn’t seem right about this. So we dig a little deeper.

At this point, we really have to step back and think about what we are trying to maximize here. We can see that maximizing weaning weight just isn’t right. But should we be trying to maximize lbs calf weaned? The answer is definitely no. If we are raising cattle as a business, we should be trying to realize the most weight. This may not be the best indicator of stocking rate.

So let’s look at this data in a different way. Instead of looking at weights, let’s look at economic values. Figure 1 shows the data in Table 1 with current value of all calves weaned on the y-axis and stocking rate on the x-axis. Also I fit a line through these points to show an average of where we would be at each stocking rate. It is pretty clear when we look at this chart that we make more money when we wean lighter calves than when we wean heavier calves. But if we look at this chart for a minute, we can see that there is what economists call diminishing marginal returns. When we add an extra cow to the pasture, we add some extra lbs of calf. As we add more and more cows, the amount of weight we add from an extra cow decreases.

Pasture is an awesome resource! It responds to management over time, and can be restored if it has been abused. Some of the inputs, like solar energy, water and carbon dioxide, are still free, and they combine to form carbohydrates, proteins, fats and fat oils (food). It is renewable, and once grazed will begin to grow back fast. Mow another area in the yard at a one inch height, really “sculpt” it, and it won’t grow a whole lot. You will mow it occasionally, or you’ll mow the weeds that are outgrowing the grass. Or, mow your yard often and remove about one third of it at a time and mow another area of your yard infrequently and “sculpt” it. Each of these will result in different plant growth.

Now that we have this marginal value of stocking rate, we can start to think through the cost side. At Eldon Farms, our historical average cow cost is about $465 per head. We could argue that this number changes based on number of cows that we have, but for now let’s keep things simple and assume that this cost is constant. Economic theory tells us that our profits will be maximized where marginal cost equals marginal revenue. In other words, our ideal stocking rate should be where the line in Figure 2 crosses $465, which is shown by the dotted lines. This places our ideal stocking rate at 135 cows.

Grazing (Grass), the Cattleman’s CROP!

By: Blox Daughtery

Note: This is a reprint from another article by Blox Daughtery, look for additional excerpts in future editions of The Forager.

What exactly is a “pasture”? Webster’s Dictionary defines it as 1) plants grown for the feeding of grazing animals, or 2) land used for grazing. In answering that same question, a cattleman I met at a back fence defined his pasture as “all the land on my farm that’s not in a crop”. This farmer grew corn, soybeans, and a lot of hay, and also had a herd of beef cows. I was rather confused by his perception that his pasture was of lower value than his corn land, but then realized that he fed his cattle, and to him, his “pasture” was just where the cows stayed. But another cattleman I met defined his “pasture” as “the most important crop on my farm, and the backbone of my cattle operation”. And that really got me to thinking. What if we looked at our pastures as if it were an “crop”, and how would that change the way we manage it?

Our native grasses were adapted to grazing long before we were here. Migrating animals, including buffalo, grazed them and moved on. It was a natural rotational grazing system. But, our forefathers found it much easier to manage their livestock with fences. Controlling livestock was much easier and efficient, but the confinement permitted deterioration of our native grasses, specifically by overgrazing. The good news is that grasslands can be renovated because they respond to good management.

Grass management is leaf management, which has a direct influence on the plant’s roots. Depending on the species and environment, 20% to 50% of grass roots must be replaced annually. But in ALL cases, the amount of leaf removal has a direct effect on the roots continued growing. Grazing animals often look at these new tender little shoots like “candy” and take them off way too soon. So the plants need some “time off” to recover and should not be grazed while recovering.

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This past June my advisee David Schlueter competed in the AFGC Emerging Scientist competition in French Lick, Indiana. David’s research focused on methods of frost seeding clover into permanent pastures and variables that determine successful establishment. Grazing trials and small-plot experiments using red and white clover mixtures were conducted in Blacksburg from 2009 to 2011. In his first experiment, David compared two frost seeding methods, broadcast and no-till drilling, under rotational grazing. Broadcast seeding in February produced about 50% more clover seedlings than drilling. Later in the summer though, we could find no difference in clover yield between the seeding methods. Interestingly, we noticed that pastures that had less than 1 inch of stubble when we overseeded produced the most clover seedlings and had highest clover yields.

Using smaller experimental plots, David evaluated three factors we thought were important to establish frost seeded clover: fertilization with P and K, cutting frequency, and grass stubble height at sowing. David found that the highest clover yields were in plots that had very little grass biomass (less than 1 inch) at sowing and then were clipped every three weeks to mimic rotational grazing. In a nutshell, his research showed that good clover stands could be established with either broadcast or drilling. Establishment success instead depended on several environmental factors: 1) reducing grass stubble to less than 1 inch before overseeding, 2) suppressing grass competition in spring with rotational grazing, 3) adjusting soil fertility to achieve good pH, P and K concentrations and, 4) having plentiful rainfall during the establishment year. This combination of conditions allow for many clover seedlings to emerge and then establish later in the growing season. More important, David’s results suggest that these variables work together such that if one of these conditions is not met (e.g., no rotational grazing in spring) clover establishment may be unsuccessful. David faced tough competition at the AFGC meeting and did not win the Emerging Scientist competition this year. Nevertheless, I feel his work offers important insights into clover management that could ultimately benefit many grass farmers in our region.

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

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

By: Carl C. Stafford

Beef farmers are in an interesting situation now with added cash flow coming from beef sales and the steady to rising tide of calf income. We fall prey to the temptation to spend when extra cash arrives in our budgets. Maybe a replacement tractor, a new piece of hay equipment, a better truck or a piece of shop equipment we could never afford. Each farm is different and you know the best use of income – but some spending is more likely to create return.

Now is a good time to pay down debt and to target spending to income producing assets. Soil fertility is a good start. For most beef farms, hay production requires regular replacement of nutrients, as we export them from the hay field to the feeding area. Farmers know that nutrients must go back where they came from or the land will revert to briars, bushes and forest. Hay making forces us to replace nutrients, an annual problem with few easy answers as fertilizer demand increases worldwide with living standards. Maybe legumes can grow some or all of the nitrogen you need. With pasture ground, your soil fertility investments will stay with you as cattle retain only about 10% of what they eat, slowly exporting nutrients off the farm as they are sold. If you manage grazing, the nutrients go back mostly where they came from. Continuous grazing allows cattle to decide on nutrient placement, usually in the shade.

Bottom line today, our extra cash flow is of interest among the service and supply sector, gratefully supporting our business. Kind of like a dairyman’s investment in milk commission base - it pays every month. Pasture soil fertility is one of those income-producing assets as are fences, certified seed and proven breeding stock to name some of the top choices. Improved plant and animal genetics are worthwhile. Buy the best bull you can find, subtract salvage value and figure he will be one the least expenses in producing a calf.

You notice no mention of trucks, tractors or equipment. There are some minimum needs here having farm to farm but often, less is more. Simply put, our equipment spending asks our cows to pay more than they can.

In the future, plan to grow nitrogen with legumes, manage grazing to control nutrient distribution and to improve productivity per acre. Make less hay to limit annual costs for nutrients, build cheap fences using fewer posts while controlling cattle. Make profitable genetic improvements using proven bulls and certified seed, and if you can change only one thing, add days of grazing to change your bottom line most. Cattle are your employees so keep them working for you.

Carl Stafford is an Extension Agent in Culpeper County and serves on the VFGC board.

A Season of Thanksgiving

As we age perhaps many of us learn to appreciate the great gifts we have been given. Our blessings are all around us, yet even when they are before our very eyes we sometimes fail to recognize them.

I was able to attend all of the 2011 Virginia Forage and Grassland Council summer tours along with other forage tours. What a great blessing they were! We live in the beautiful Commonwealth that has diverse forage production agriculture. The tours occurred in the Northern Piedmont, Southern Piedmont, Shenandoah Valley, and Southwestern Virginia. At each location I recognized many friends; another blessing. I can’t imagine working with a greater group of folks than those that have devoted their lives to forage production agriculture. Our task is a miracle unto itself. We take water, sunlight, plants, and a few nutrients and transform this into a usable product that feeds billions of people around the globe. Rarely do we really stop and appreciate the wonder of what we are involved in.

Conducting four forage tours was another miracle. Thanks to all the farmers that graciously hosted the tours. Thanks to all of our wonderful partners such as USDA-NRCS folks, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Soil and Water Districts, and others. Thanks to our sponsors. I can’t mention everyone’s name here but there were many. Your sweat and hospitality made it all possible so that others could learn.

The Virginia Forage and Grassland Council cannot properly be referred to as an association, an organization, or a club. Appropriately I refer to it as a community. We all have a common purpose, we work together, like to learn new and innovative technologies, don’t mind trying something new, and every now and then we can even agree to disagree. Our mission is diverse. It includes the horse industry, the year-round grazer, the haymaker, dairy industry, and the guy or gal that raises top quality alfalfa, corn silage and the like. Goats, sheep, beef cows, llamas and a few other critters round out the herd.

VFGC cordially invites you to attend one of our upcoming Crops Conferences in December, The American Forage and Grassland Council Conference in Louisville, Kentucky in January and the Winter State Conference in January. Visit our website for times and locations. A lot of folks have worked hard to make these events a reality. Hopefully this message reaches you and your family in good health and spirit. See you soon and have a wonderful Thanksgiving and Holiday season.

Best Regards,
Robert Shoemaker
President, VFGC

President's Message

Gaining Ground

By: J. B. Daniel

A farming revolution is spreading across Virginia. Live-stock Farmers are switching to rotational grazing and crop producers are switching to No-till systems. Both approaches save farmers time and money. They also benefit the land, restoring soil health and dramatically cutting runoff and soil erosion. The net result is more profitable and productive farms – and better water quality downstream. In two 15 minute movies released by Virginia USDA-NRCS and its conservation partners on October 24, a dozen Virginia farmers explain how managed grazing and continuous no-till improved their farms and their lives. You will see familiar faces as most of the livestock producers in the grazing movie are VFGC members. Also featured are amazing soil and water demonstrations that show how these farmers are truly gaining ground.

You can view these movies at www.GainingGroundVirginia.org or at your local NRCS, Soil and Water Conservation District, or Cooperative Extension offices. If you have a group that would like to view the movies contact one of the above office in your area, CD’s and larger screens are available.

By: J. B. Daniel is a Forage & Grassland Agronomist, USDA-NRCS and also serves on the VFGC board.

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The Forage of the Future is Here!

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http://vaforages.org - Contact Margaret Kenny at makenny@vt.edu or call 434-292-5331
The Virginia Forage and Grassland Council and Virginia Cooperative Extension will hold a series of “Small Grain Silage and Haylage” conferences at the following locations:

- **Tuesday, December 6, 2011** – Wytheville Meeting Center, Wytheville
- **Wednesday, December 7, 2011** – The Franklin Center, Rocky Mount
- **Thursday, December 8, 2011** – Montezuma Hall, Dayton

Tom Kilcer, retired Extension Educator from Cornell University, will be the featured speaker. Mr. Kilcer has over 20 years of experience with research and field trials in small grain silage production. Mr. Kilcer will also discuss the “haylage in a day” concept where swath widths and mowing times are adjusted to increase drying speed and preserve plant nutrients for improved haylage quality.

**Equine Conference: Building a Stronger Bond Between You and Your Horse**

The Virginia Forage and Grassland Council and Virginia Cooperative Extension will hold the 2012 Southern Piedmont Equine Conference: You, Your Horse, and the Environment. The conference will be held at Virginia Tech’s Southern Piedmont Agricultural Research and Extension Center located outside of Blackstone, VA in late March 2012. The keynote speaker will be nationally known horse trainer Scott Pundum of Advantage Horsemanship. Scott will discuss building a stronger bond between you and your horse. Other topics that will be covered include horse pasture establishment and management, natural hoof care, bits and biting, preventive and emergency medicine for your horse, selecting high quality hay for your horse, and protecting your soil and water resources from erosion. For more information on this conference please visit the VFGC’s website at www.vaforages.org or contact Margaret Kanny at 434-292-5331.

**Planning for the Unexpected?**

By: Gordon Groover

The current business climate for livestock producers is an ideal example of why management and planning are important. Just a few headlines form the press show the good and not so good of the current economic situation, for example, Korean free trade agreement helps beef exports, yield uncertainty in the corn crop makes markets skittish, Euro crisis tightens credit markets, world demand for protein is bullish. All this could make you skittish about the news regardless of whether it’s electronic or newprint. So what’s a business manager to do? Thinking about my job, it requires planning for the expected, for example, writing a news article, and the unexpected, a visit from my department head asking me to chair a committee. Regardless of our job or position we have to plan to meet the expected and the unexpected. The last statement, planning for the unexpected, sounds, well silly. How can you plan for the unexpected? How do you plan for a 20% drop in prices or rapidly escalating feed prices driven by the demand for biofuels? To answer, I’ll quote Dwight D. Eisenhower, who said, “The plan is useless; it’s the planning that’s important.” So even though you spend months working up a superb business plan that lays out in detail how the business will succeed, “it may be useless” when the uncertainty of normal life occurs. Often the focus of getting the plan finished distracts us from the most important task when creating a plan; that is, knowledge and understanding how the business may respond to changes driven by unforeseen events. The key is the mental exercise you get from planning and developing what-if strategies. Working out hypothetical responses to problems (a 20% drop in net income) and opportunities (a long term lease is available for the 300 acres farm next door) will give you the mental and fiscal agility to make sound decisions. The time spent planning is an investment in planning for the unexpected and the long-term survival of your business.

Gordon Groover is an Extension Economist, Farm Management, Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics, Virginia Tech and also serves on the VFGC Board.