

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

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 other 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 famers 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 haying.

- 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.
  - Thursday, January 19, in Gordonsville, at the Gordonsville Volunteer Fire Company Hall
  - 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- <i>Kathy Voth</i>
10:15-10:45	Break - Visit Sponsors
10:45-11:45	Soil fertility and weed control - speaker – <i>Chris Teutsch</i>
11:45-12:00	VFGC Business Meeting – <i>Robert Shoemaker</i>
12:00 -1:00	Lunch —Visit Sponsors
1:00-1:15	Gaining Ground - <i>J.B. Daniel</i> , 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- <i>Scott Hagood</i>
2:45 - 3:00	Weed grazing: putting science into practice- <i>Kathy Voth</i>
3:00	Adjourn



## Directions

### WYTHEVILLE 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/I-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:
- <http://rec.wytheville.org/directions.php>.

### OLDE DOMINION AGRICULTURAL COMPLEX

*17983 US Hwy 29S, Chatham, VA 24531*

Travelling South from Lynchburg: travel approximately 42 miles on 29 South. Bypass the town of Gretna and continue on 29 South. Just outside of Gretna 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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# 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 Spitler.

Over the past seven years, we have inadvertently run a sort of grazing experiment in Spitler 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 Spitler. 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 Spitler?

Table 1: Data on past 7 years Spitler production

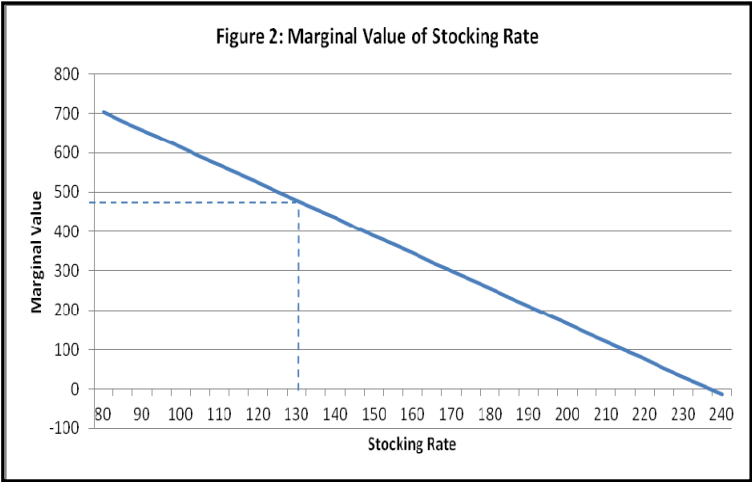
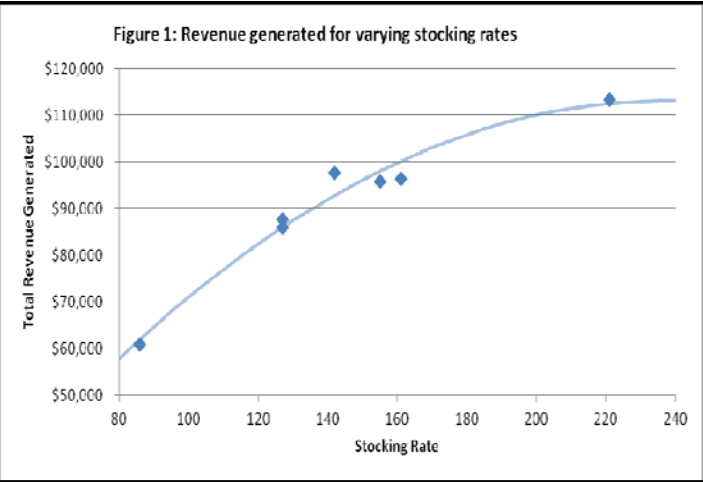
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Adjusted Wean Weight	344	441	423	505	494	508	524
Calves Weaned	221	155	161	142	127	127	86
Tons Calf Weaned	38.0	34.2	34.1	35.9	31.4	32.3	22.5

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 Spitler this year, which represents about a 40% decrease in total tons of calf that Spitler 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 weaning 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 isn’t right. But should we be trying to maximize lbs calf weaned? The answer is definitely not. If we are raising cattle as a business, we should be trying to maximize **profits**, not lbs of calf weaned. As cattlemen and grazers and farmers, we constantly chase biological max- imums and optimums and forget that we are running businesses.

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. I also 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 more light calves than when we wean fewer heavier calves. But if we look at this chart for a minute, we can see that there is what economists call diminishing marginal returns at work here. To illustrate this point, look at the increase in total value we get from increasing the stocking rate from 100 cows to 101 cows (in other words, how much does the line go up when we add this cow). Now look at the increase in revenue we get when we increase the stocking rate from 200 cows to 201 cows. This second jump is smaller than the first, which means we get less out of adding an extra cow to the field as the number of cows in the field goes up. We can actually graph this “marginal value” (or the in- crease in total value from adding an extra cow) as is shown in Figure 2.



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 the 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.

# Pasture (Grass), the Cattleman’s CROP!

By: Blox Daughtery

*Note: This is a reprint from a longer article by Blox Daugherty, 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 a while back defined his pasture as “all the land on my farm that’s not in a crop”. This farmer grew corn, soy- beans, 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 crop 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 a “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 live- stock 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.

Pasture is an awesome resource! It responds to manage- ment over time, and can be restored if it has been abused. Some of the inputs, like solar energy, water and carbon diox- ide, are still free, and they combine to form carbohydrates, proteins, fats and fat oils (food). It is renewable, and once restored and well managed, is self-sustaining.

Its important to understand just how grass grows. The main growing points are at the base of the plant near the soil surface. As long as the growing point remains intact, the plant can put forth new growth. But, there is a critical time when these growing points “joint”, and elongate to produce a seed stem, after which, if this growing point is removed by grazing or mowing, growth on that particular stem stops. That “tiller” is done, and new growth then relies on the dormant buds near the base of the plant (similar to spring green-up). This new growth needs time to establish enough leaf area to produce carbohydrates before being removed, or plant vigor declines, even to the point where carbohydrate reserves in the plant are depleted. 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.

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 impact on the growth of new roots. F. J. Crider did the research in 1956, and the data is still true today. When 80% of leaf was removed, root growth halted for 12 days, and when 90% of leaf was removed, root growth halted for 18 days. But, when only 50% of leaf was removed, almost all of the roots continued growing.

<u>% Leaf Removal</u>	<u>% Root Growth Stopped</u>
10%	0%
20%	0%
30%	0%
40%	0%
50%	2-4%
60%	50%
70%	78%
80%	100%
90%	100%

This explains why the turfgrass experts insist that only one- third of your lawn be removed in any one mowing. It also gives scientific proof to a cliché from out west regarding graz- ing, that being “take half and leave half”.

You can replicate this data in your yard. Mow your yard at a four inch height, and you will mow it a lot because it grows back fast. Mow another area in the yard at a one inch height, really “scalp 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 ‘scalp’ it. Use a mower with a bagger and save the clip- pings. In which of these scenarios will you have cut the most grass?? (Grazed the most grass??) Have healthier grass and forage plants with more vigor?? Have fewer weeds??

*Blox Daughtery is a Market Development Specialist with Dow AgroSciences.*







## AFGC Annual Conference January 9-10, 2012 Crowne Plaza • Louisville, Kentucky

Join the **American Forage and Grassland Council** for the very best in education, exhibits and networking. You will hear relevant presentations about forage production and utilization practices that will help you be more profitable. From the opening program to the closing session, you'll find activities and information designed to help you navigate today's forage and grassland environment. The Forage Spokesperson Competition, Forage Bowl, Emerging Scientist Competition, Photo Contest and more await you in Louisville, KY, January 9-10, 2012. For more information call 800-944-2342 or visit [www.afgc.org](http://www.afgc.org)!

### Conference Highlights

- Sessions addressing our most pressing issues
- The best products and services displayed on the exhibit floor
- Networking opportunities designed to keep you connected with your peers
- One day registration fees to accommodate schedules
- Contests, awards, research displays and much more



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### The AFGC 2011 Emerging Scientist Competition: "Overseeding Clover into Permanent Pastures"

By Ben Tracy and David Schlueter

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 clovers into permanent pasture 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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### 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 Conferences 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

## 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](http://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.

J. B. Daniel is a Forage & Grassland Agronomist, USDA-NRCS 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 cull cow 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 world-wide 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 businesses. Do not get me wrong, we need them and without them, we would be at a disadvantage. You decide which inputs will make your farm the most money and if you are profitable, they profit too.

Our job is to put money to work in assets that keep on paying. 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 varying 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.

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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

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## 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 Purdum 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.vaforges.org](http://www.vaforges.org) or contact Margaret Kenny at 434-292-5331.

THE

# VIRGINIA FORAGER

A publication of the Virginia Forage and Grassland Council



Volume 33 Number 1

Winter 2012

## VFGC 2011 SMALL GRAIN SILAGE AND HAYLAGE CONFERENCES

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.

Dr. Chris Teutsch, Extension Forage Specialist, from the Virginia Tech Southern Piedmont Agricultural Research and Extension Center will share data and discuss the feasibility of using ryegrass as an economical silage and grazing crop. Dr. Teutsch has over a decade of experience working with rye grass production in Virginia and will share his vast knowledge during the conference.

Dr. Tom Thompson, Department Head and crop fertility specialist, Virginia Tech Department of Crop and Soil Environmental Sciences will be on-hand to discuss proper soil nutrition for small grain and ryegrass production to maximize yield and quality. Dr. Thompson has over 20 years of soil fertility experience in the production of small grains and other silage crops

The registration fee for the conference will be \$15 per person before November 22<sup>nd</sup>. After November 22<sup>nd</sup> or at the door, the registration fee will be \$20 per person. Conference brochures with registration information and directions to each location can be obtained from the VFGC website at [www.vaforges.org](http://www.vaforges.org) or from your local Extension Office. If you are a dairy or beef producer and small grains and haylage are a part of your feeding or grazing program, you won't want to miss this very informative conference.

## 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 from 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 may tighten credit markets, world demand for protein is bullish. All this could make you skittish about the news regardless of whether it's electronic or newsprint. 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

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 bio-fuels? 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.

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