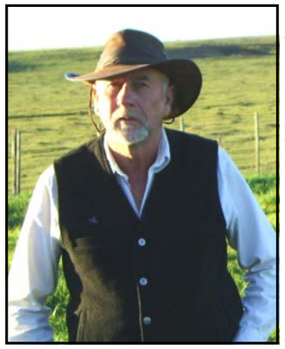
Jim Gerrish of American GrazingLands Services to Speak at the 2013 Winter Forage Conferences

By: Gordon Groover

Kicking the Hay Habit: Increasing the Profitability of Virginia's Ruminant Livestock Operations is the theme for the Virginia Forage and Grassland Council (VFGC) and Virginia Cooperative Extension winter forage conferences. Hay costs purchased or homegrown are at record highs driven by high input costs. Producers will have an ideal opportunity to gain an understanding and the details needed to determine if a kicking the hay habit and year round grazing system make ¢ents for their livestock operations.



This year's keynote speaker is Jim Gerrish of American Grazing-Lands Services LLC a international national known expert on forage -livestock systems. He has 20 years of systems research and outreach while on the faculty of the University of Missouri, as well as 20 years of commercial cattle and sheep production on their family farm in northern Missouri. The University of Missouri - Forage Systems Research Center rose to national prominence as a result of his research leadership. His research encompassed many aspects of plant-soil-animal interactions and provides foundation for many of the basic principles of Management Intensive Grazing. It is a pleasure to welcome Mr. Gerrish back to Virginia. In his morning presentation, he will cover matching your calving season to your forage resources and environment, inventorying and budgeting forages resources, selecting the right cow-type for extended grazing systems, and winter grazing options. After lunch, Mr. Gerrish will discuss the practical points of how to successfully graze winter pastures including pasture utilization and rumen function, supplementation on winter pastures, and tools and tips for getting the job done.

Participants will also hear from Dr. Greg Halich, Associate Professor and Extension Specialist, Agricultural Economics, University of Kentucky, and J.B. Daniel, Forage & Grassland Agronomist, USDA-NRCS. Dr. Halich will provide famers with knowledge of profitability differences of grazing systems including spring verse fall calving and the cost of grazing verses making and feeding haying. Mr. Daniel will help farmers understand how to plan and developing farm infrastructure to support grazing systems and the details of NRCS/costs- share programs.

This year, VFGC will also feature local livestock producers at each workshop site to discuss "How I've extended the grazing season on my farm?" These producers will provide conference participants with real insight on the challenges and benefits of implementing grazing systems that reduce the need for conserved forage.

The daylong conference will from run 8:30 am to 3:15 pm and will be held at the following locations:

- Tuesday, January 22, Warren County Comm. Center, Front Royal
- Wednesday, January 23, Weyers Cave Community Center. Weyers Cave
- Thursday, January 24, Wytheville Meeting Center, Wytheville
- Friday, January 25, Southern Piedmont AREC, Blackstone

For more information or to register for the conference, contact Margaret Kenny (makenny@vt.edu) at (434) 292-5331. The $35 early registration fee must be postmarked by Jan. 3, 2012. After the New Year, the registration fee is $50 per person. The U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service are also sponsoring the conference.

Please visit the VFGC web site (http://vaforages.org) for additional details and registration information.

Program Registration

No refunds for cancellation after January 3, 2013

Name _____

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Check which meeting you will attend:

☐ Warren County Community Center, Front Royal

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$35.00 early registration per attendee
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Student Registration $15.00 per student

Harlan White Scholarship Fund
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Make Check Payable to:

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2013 Winter Forage Conference
Margaret Kenny
3599 Indian Oak Road
Crewe, VA 23930

Comparison of Current House and Senate Conservation Proposals

By: Jim Pease

The Senate passed the Agriculture Reform, Food and Jobs Act (ARFJ) of 2012 (S.3240) on June 21, 2012, just a bit more than 3 months prior to the expiration of the 2008 Farm Bill. The House Agriculture Committee passed the Federal Agriculture Reform and Risk Management Act (FARRM) of 2012 (HR. 6083) on July 11, but it is unlikely that the full House will act on the measure before the session adjourns for the August recess. Conservation titles of the two bills are similar, and have been praised by multiple conservation organizations, which seems somewhat surprising, considering that many programs will be repealed and $1.756 billion was cut from Title II programs over 2013-2017. However, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimates conservation spending will total a hefty $57.7 billion over 2013-2017 under the Senate bill. Even with a cut of approximately 11% over the next ten years, it is likely that many environmental organizations feared worse, and were (relatively) happy that the Conservation Title cuts were no larger than those developed during the failed Super-committee budget-cutting attempt of late 2011.

The following is a brief comparison of the conservation provisions in the new bills. Both bills consolidate 23 conservation programs into 13 programs, as noted below. Although many existing programs were repealed, most of their functions were rolled into a few new programs. Although programs have been reshuffled, renamed, and consolidated, the basic Conservation Portfolio categories of Land Retirement and Easements, Working Lands, Conservation Compliance and other programs still exist.

Land Retirement and Easements

Land retirement programs provide payments to landowners in exchange for limits on farmland use, practices or development. Easement programs differ only because the land-use restriction is permanent. In the 2008 Farm Bill, these programs included the Conservation Reserve Program and its sub -programs the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program; the Farmable Wetlands Program; the Wetlands Reserve Program and its sub-program the Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program; the Grasslands Reserve Program and the Farmland Protection Program.

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

CRP offers annual rental payments to farm land owners who agree to temporarily retire environmentally sensitive land from production and establish/maintain a conserving use on the land. CRP enrollment authority has declined during the past years as high commodity prices gave producers compelling incentives to return CRP land to production. Both the House and Senate responded to this opportunity for budget cutting (expenditures for CRP contracts total approximately $2 billion/year) by stepping down the enrollment authority from the current 32 million acres to 25 million acres by FY2017. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) scores the budget savings as $1.32 billion over the 2013-2017 expected life of the 2012 Farm Bill. The Grasslands Reserve Program is repealed, but CRP is amended so as to allow enrollment of similar land. The maximum grasslands enrollment is limited to 1.5 -2 million acres under the Senate or House provisions. The Farmable Wetlands program is re-authorized and made a permanent program, but receives a reduced 750,000 acre enrollment cap under CRP.

Agricultural Conservation Easement Programs (ACEP)

All USDA conservation easement programs are repealed (Wetland Reserve Program, Farmland Protection Program, Grasslands Reserve Program and Farm Viability Program), but their program objectives and functions are consolidated under the new Agricultural Conservation Easement Program. In the Senate bill, the CBO estimates spending in the new program at $809 million more than the existing programs would spend over 2013-2022.

Working Lands Programs

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

EQIP provides cost-share and incentive payments for adoption of conservation practices or structures on agricultural land that remains in production. EQIP has been the largest Working Lands program under the 2008 Farm Bill, with budget authority of $7.325 billion between FY2008-FY2012. EQIP is re-authorized for 2013-2017, but with reduced budgets. Under the Senate Bill, EQIP budget authority shrinks by nearly $1 billion over the next 10 years, but the House Bill does not reduce funding authority from its current $1.75 billion annual level. Both bills target 5% of funding for funding wildlife habitat protection practices in a manner similar to those of the repealed Wildlife Habitat Incentives (WHIP) program.

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

CSP is a "green" payment program, a working lands program designed to reward producers who achieve and maintain above–benchmark standards of conservation management. The program is re-authorized for 2013-2017 in both House and Senate proposals. The bills establish a priority consideration for land with expiring CRP contracts. Enrollment caps are reduced by 19% in the Senate bill and 30% in the House bill, yielding an expenditure reduction of $452 million annually over 2013-2017.

Conservation Compliance

Since 1996, participants in the federally subsidized crop insurance program are not subject to loss of benefits if they produce an agricultural commodity on highly erodible land without an approved conservation plan or qualifying exemption, or convert a wetland to crop production. The Senate bill revokes this provision, but the House bill does not.

Other Programs

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

Several federal partnership programs are also repealed and their functions are consolidated under the banner of the Regional Conservation Partnership Program, which partners with state and local governments, native American tribes, farmer coops and other organizations to leverage funds on a regional or watershed scale. Both bills repeal such programs as the Agriculture Water Enhancement Program, the Great Lakes basin program, the Chesapeake

Conservation page 11

Some Economics of Backpack and Handgun Spot Spraying

By: Blox Daughtery

For controlling unwanted plants in pastures and in fencerows, backpack sprayers, and handgun sprayers mounted on an ATV or small tractor, provide a huge bang for the buck, especially after you get an understanding of the time required and the amount of chemicals that are used. In recent plots using a backpack sprayer to apply herbicide to foliage of red cedar trees, buckbrush (coralberry, devil's shoestring), multiflora rose, bush (tartarrian) honeysuckle, and autumn olive, the amount of time and the costs of chemicals was tracked, to provide some estimates for the chemical costs of future projects. Here's what was learned:

A four gallon backpack sprayer will provide about one hour of spraying plants that are about **knee to waist high, and will cover 500 to 600 plants**, using a cone nozzle, moderately low pressure, and wetting as much foliage as possible.

Labeled options and economics for a four gallon backpack sprayer (also, add ¼ - ½ % surfactant to Surmount or Grazon + Remedy, and ½ % surfactant to PastureGard):

2% Surmount: Requires 10.25 ounces of Surmount in four gallons of water. Surmount was purchased at about $0.55 per ounce, 10.25 oz = $5.64, which, when used on 500 to 600 plants equates to $0.009 to $0.011 per plant (averages 1.0 cent per plant).

2% Grazon + ½% Remedy Ultra: Requires 10.25 oz of Grazon and 2.56 oz Remedy in four gallons of water, which was purchased at about $5.84, which when used on 500 to 600 plants equates to $0.0097 to $0.012 per plant (averages 1.1 cents per plant).

2% PastureGard: Requires 10.25 ounces of PastureGard in four gallons of water. PastureGard was purchased at about $0.51 per ounce, 10.25 oz = $5.23, which when used on 500 to 600 plants equates to $0.0087 to $0.01 per plant (averages 0.95 cents per plant).

In recent plots, using a four gallon backpack sprayer on taller cedar trees, up to **four feet tall, covered about 400 plants**. The Surmount treatment cost was 1.4 cents per plant, The Grazon + Remedy treatment cost was 1.5 cents per plant, and the PastureGard treatment cost was 1.3 cents per plant, but does not appear to be as good as the other two treatments on red cedars.

In recent demonstrations spraying **fencerows** with brush three to six feet tall, a four gallon backpack sprayer covered approximately 750 feet of fencerow. This is less than a penny per foot, protecting a fence that costs $4.00 or more per foot to construct. In a recent fence row demonstration applying herbicide to weeds and brush that was less than a foot tall (a preventive measure to "nip 'em in the bud), four gallons covered 3000 feet, at a cost of about two-fifths of a cent, protecting a fence that costs $4.00 or more per to construct. The point here is that the labor costs are higher than the cost of the herbicides when using a backpack. And, that weed control to keep a nice fence from growing up in weeds and brush is fairly inexpensive if done regularly, which would be about every two years, or every three years in some cases where the species to be controlled are slower growers.

Editors Note: Use of brand name herbicides in this article does not constitute an endorsement of these brands by the VFGC. Always follow university recommendations and label directions when choosing and applying herbicides.

Blox Daughtery is with Dow AgroSciences and also serves on the VFGC Board.

Tips for Efficiently Utilizing Stockpiled Tall Fescue

Once we have stockpiled grass on the ground, how we choose to utilize it can dramatically impact how may grazing days we get per acre. Research in Missouri showed that giving cows access to only enough forage for 3-days versus 14-days resulted in a 40% increase in grazing days per acre. In a dry year, this could mean the difference buying hay when prices are high or making it through with what you already have. The following tips will help to get the most of your stockpile.

Graze pastures that contain warm-season grasses first. Although we often like to think of pastures as monocultures, they are often complex mixtures of cool- and warm-season grasses, legumes and weedy forbs. If pastures contain warm-season grasses, use these first since their quality will decline rapidly in late fall and early winter.

Graze pastures containing clover next. We are always happy to see clover in pastures. However, in a stockpiling scenario it does not hold up to freezing and thawing as well as tall fescue. So mixed pastures before pure stands of tall fescue.

Save pastures with tall fescue for later grazing. Tall fescue is by the best grass for stockpiling in terms of maintaining its nutritive value as you head into winter. So graze pure stands last.

Strip graze tall fescue. As mentioned above, limiting access to stockpiled forage can significantly increase grazing days per acre. Strip grazing usually starts at the water source and then uses a single strand of electrified polywire to allocate only enough forage for the predetermined time period. It could 1, 2, 3, or more days. The shorter the time period the better utilization you will get. Since pastures are not actively growing during the winter months, no back fencing is needed.

To many producers that have not stripped grazed, the idea of moving a temporary fence two of three times a week can seem overwhelming. However, once you are set up it really goes pretty fast and the pay backs are huge—a free day of feed every time you move the fence. Is it less work than feeding hay? Probably not less, but just different and the pay back is much better.

Upcoming Events

November 29, 2012
VT Beef Webinar
Email: mark.mccann@vt.edu

December 5 in Dayton
December 6 in Rocky Mount
December 7 in Wytheville.
2012 VFGC Winter Crops Conferences
www.vaforages.org

December 8, 2012 in Culpeper
VA BCIA Culpeper Senior Bull Sale
Email: sgreiner@vt.edu

January 9-11, 2013
AFGC Annual Conference
Covington, KY
www.afgc.org

January 21-25, 2013
2013 VFGC Winter Conferences
www.vaforages.org

January 26, 2013 in Blacksburg
VT Beef Cattle Health Conference
Email: reroop@vt.edu

February 1, 2013
Virginia Beef and Dairy Convention , Hotel Roanoke
Email: jcarter@vacattlemen.org

Graze 300 Days!

By: Carl C. Stafford

As I write this article in early October, a new growing season is well on its way here in the Northern Piedmont of Virginia. I could confuse readers with this statement as spring is long gone, but my reference is to the fall growing season of cool season grasses, most notable – fescue. The fescue-stockpiling season is my point and what a nice start we have following a dry summer. Ample rainfall in our area in September and early October improves our prospects of grazing past 300 days.

There is a growing season and a grazing season and for many people they are the same. Once grass stops growing, the stocking rate on most farms forces producers to use hay. On the other hand, the grazing season does not have to stop just because grass growth ceases. It can extend on into winter if you have accumulated stockpiles of fescue. However, a surplus (stockpile) depends on rain, fertility and a stocking rate to allow accumulation. In short, you are under stocked during the fall growing season if there is any hope of grazing past Christmas.

Graze 300 is a catchy title first used in March 2005 for a program held in Rapidan and attended by producers interested in learning about extending their grazing season past the growing season. Most people can figure out a way to limit hay feeding to just 65 days, especially in today's economy with the high cost of making hay. Dr Gordon Groover, Virginia Tech Agricultural Economist, writes in the Progressive Forage Grower available at http://www.progressiveforage.com/ wherein he explains the cost of making hay. Limiting the use of hay is one way to add to your bottom line.

Attendees at the first Graze 300 program saw cattle grazing in early March, having eaten little or no hay and yet with excellent body condition and nice calves at side. Intentionally managing for fall calving cows will seem illogical if you depend on pasture throughout the grazing season, particularly

since there is more natural surplus in the spring. This topic deserves further investigation as there are many good reasons for fall calving.

It never is easy to graze in the winter what with the threat of snow and ice covering your feed and with the potential to have wet soils and sods easily damaged by hoof action. Your "chicken factor" must be high enough that you will not turn tail and run with the first flake of snow.

Many readers are accustomed to sod damage in winter, an accepted result from feeding cattle hay in concentrated numbers. However, it is the last thing a pasture manager is willing to accept as the pasture comes first no matter if you own or rent land, but particularly if you rent from a landowner who values a good sod. Sod damage happens in the winter no matter how careful you are.

We know many people graze livestock during the growing season, be they small ruminants, horses, or cattle. Pasture is a natural use of the land, it is simple, requires only a few tools and it is the most efficient way to feed an animal capable of digesting forage. In the cattle industry, there is a phenomenon known as grass fever. Simply stated, this means buyers know spring is coming, they want cattle to graze their pasture and they will pay the price to get them. They graze cattle during the growing season then sell into the fall run of surplus feeder cattle along with everyone else. However, there is another way.

While growing season grazing is a traditional use of pasture and probably the most common use for livestock owners in general – that is to graze during the growing season, readers should consider extending grazing past the growing season. Granted it is not traditional and not typically taught.

Economics can line up in your favor if you figure out when profits are most likely to be made - which is when you have the chance to cut costs most. The cost of production has far more to do with farm profitability than does the value or volume of your production. Dr Kevin Dhuyvetter at Kansas State University finds this to be true in his study found at www.agmanager.info where he examines characteristics of high, medium and low profit beef producers. Costs matter more than value or volume.

Your highest cost is from using stored feed in the winter. If you limit your spending then and animal performance does not suffer, more money will be left over. Graze 300 and find additional profits.

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

Bioenergy: Is there an ideal crop?

By: John Fike

"Agriculture" is a mash up of a couple of ideas: "agri" refers to agronomy and its attendant issues, and "culture", which subsumes all of the whys and ways we do things. Surveys of Southside and Southwest Virginia producers in Virginia have indicated some disinterest in growing energy crops even if it is profitable (although the level of profitability wasn't defined and may be a deciding factor here). For this group, cultural aspects – familiarity with the crop, a willingness to do something different – may be the greatest limitation to adoption. Experience also suggests that those whose culture includes planting and growing cash crops are more ready and willing to consider biomass crop production. Among this set of farmers, one of the first questions to arise in considering bioenergy production is "What should I grow?" As noted in a previous article, the lack of economic drivers – a market and competitive pricing for biomass relative to other crops – is the limitation for this group

Assuming a market develops, the choice of an energy crop needs to be considered in the context of a whole farm system. Outside of sugarcane, the two species that have received the most attention for *perennial* energy cropping are switchgrass and miscanthus. Each has certain advantages and disadvantages depending on one's perspective.

In the USA, and certainly in Virginia, switchgrass has received the most research attention both as a forage and as a fuel feedstock because it is a native species and it has good yield potential. Switchgrass may also fit with existing cattle operations as a dual use crop – i.e., for forage grazed or hayed during the growing season and for bioenergy harvested after killing frost. Although switchgrass has often considered difficult to establish, we've learned quite a lot about soil preparation, seed dormancy, and weed control and these hurdles are disappearing. From a forage producer's perspective, there usually is benefit in having a warm season grass such as switchgrass as part of a forage system. This would provide a source of summer feed, reduce stresses on cool season grass pastures during summer, and, for folks with fescue based systems it would reduce the exposure of livestock to alkaloids during the summer months. This has been the basis of promoting switchgrass, but whether switchgrass is the right fit given other management needs remains a question – there's that culture issue again.

Miscanthus is gaining increasing attention for bioenergy because of its high productivity – which will likely surpass that of switchgrass in much of the upper South. Miscanthus will be a "dedicated" energy crop, as it has little value as a livestock feed. Several miscanthus species exist, and one of the most promising is Miscanthus × giganteus, a sterile hybrid. Sterility is important, here, because many "garden variety" miscanthus plants sold as ornamentals have viable seed – and in some locations they're starting to spread. The tradeoff with a sterile plant is that it has to be established vegetatively, raising the upfront costs. Continued research efforts are bringing those costs down, and the question is whether added productivity (and processing quality) compensates for this. Alternatively, some companies are looking at high-yielding, seedable miscanthus species that would have limited invasiveness, but whether this will work is a huge question.

As noted in a previous article, the ability to produce bioenergy and biofuels is certainly on the horizon. The development and distribution of these systems depends on many interrelated factors, including technology, policy, profitability, social acceptance – and grower culture.

One final note: Many of you may be familiar with the idea of using switchgrass as a biomass source, but you may not know that Dr. Dale Wolf, (CSES, retired) was instrumental in getting the US Department of Energy to test switchgrass for biomass production. Switchgrass is both native of and adapted to much of North America, and its performance in those initial trials led DOE to research switchgrass as a model crop for bioenergy development. Along with his impact on DOE, Dr. Wolf helped get switchgrass planted around Virginia, and many farms have those stands even 15+ years after they were planted.

John Fike is with Virginia Tech as an Associate Professor in the Crop Soil and Environmental Science and he also serves on the VFGC Board.

Feeding from Front Page

what supplement can meet your cows' requirements. As a general rule of thumb, protein is generally adequate in fescue hay for dry pregnant cows. Energy is the most limiting nutrient in hay and can be supplemented with several by-product feeds. Soybean hulls, corn gluten feed, and distiller grains can all be used to supplement hay. The low starch levels in these feeds can even improve the digestibility of the hay.

In conclusion we need to know what animals we are feeding to determine their nutritional needs, the nutrient content of the hay, and if we need to supplement. If you know these three things, feeding hay can be done as efficiently and as economically as possible.

Brian Campbell is the Ruminant Livestock Specialist with Virginia Tech's Southern Piedmont AREC in Blackstone, VA.

Farmer of the Year Page 2

"My first memories of farm chores include riding mules in tobacco fields," he recalled. "I spent many days as a young boy learning the ins and outs of farming from my grandfather and my dad. We had a hog operation while I was in high school." Watkins earned the State FFA Degree in 1979. After high school, he farmed with his father. He remembers growing pumpkins, the first crop he grew on his own. After his father died in 1994, he assumed full responsibility for the farm and started growing tobacco and cotton.

Watkins finds time to assume leadership positions in local agricultural and community organizations. He serves on the committee for the U.S. Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency in Dinwiddie County. He also serves on the board of directors for the Appomattox River Soil and Water Conservation District where he has received awards for his work in education and conservation and as a director. He sits on the board of the Dinwiddie County Industrial Development Authority and has been a volunteer Extension leader. Previously, Watkins served on the board of the local Southern States Cooperative and was on the cooperative's advisory board of young farmers.

As Virginia Farmer of the Year, Watkins received a $2,500 cash award and an expense-paid trip to the Sunbelt Ag Expo farm show in Moultrie, Ga., from Swisher International; a $500 gift certificate from Southern States Cooperative; and the choice of either $1,000 in PhytoGen cottonseed or a $500 donation to a designated charity on behalf ofof Dow AgroSciecnes.

Each farmer and nominator also received a Columbia Cathedral Peak fleece vest, courtesy of Ivey's Outdoor and Farm Supply of Albany, Ga.

Virginia Cooperative Extension recognized Maxwell Watkins of Sutherland as the 2012 Virginia Farmer of the Year at the Virginia Junior Livestock Expo on Oct. 13, in Harrisonburg. Pictured from left to right: Robert Grisso, associate director of agriculture and natural resources for Virginia Cooperative Extension; Michael Parrish, agriculture and natural resources Extension agent in Dinwiddie Country; Maxwell Watkins; Susan Watkins; Cody Watkins; and Matt Lohr, commissioner, Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. Not pictured: Nick Watkins.

In accepting the award, Watkins joins the short list of farmers in the running for Southeastern Farmer of the Year.

Extension has nominated individuals for Swisher Sweets/ Sunbelt Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year since the award's inception in 1990.

Previous state winners include: Nelson Gardner of Bridgewater, 1990; Russell Inskeep of Culpeper, 1991; Harry Bennett of Covington, 1992; Hilton Hudson of Alton, 1993; Buck McCann of Carson, 1994; George M. Ashman Jr. of Amelia, 1995; Bill Blalock of Baskerville, 1996; G.H. Peery III of Ceres, 1997; James Bennett of Red House, 1998; Ernest Copenhaver of Meadowview, 1999; John Davis of Port Royal, 2000; James Huffard III of Crockett, 2001; J. Hudson Reese of Scottsburg, 2002; Charles Parkerson of Suffolk, 2003; Lance Everett of Stony Creek, 2004; Monk Sanford of Orange, 2005; Paul House of Nokesville, 2006; Steve Berryman of Surry, 2007; Tim Sutphin of Dublin, 2008; Billy Bain of Dinwiddie, 2009; Wallick Harding of Jetersville, 2010; and Donald Horsley of Virginia Beach, 2011.

Virginia Cooperative Extension (http://www.ext.vt.edu/) brings the resources of Virginia's land-grant universities, Virginia Tech and Virginia State University, to the people of the commonwealth. Through a system of on-campus specialists and locally based educators, it delivers education in the areas of agriculture and natural resources, family and consumer sciences, community viability, and 4-H youth development. With a network of faculty at two universities, 107 county and city offices, 11 agricultural research and Extension centers, and six 4-H educational centers, Virginia Cooperative Extension provides solutions to the problems facing Virginians today.

Why Best Management Practices?

By: Eric S. Bendfeldt

Even though I was born in the last century, I have to adapt to the demands and expectations of the 21st century. Farming and water stewardship must also adapt to the new demands and expectations of the 21st century.

The need to support agriculture and protect the quality of local waterways is foundational to farming and water stewardship in the 21st century. Controlling soil loss, erosion, and nutrient runoff -- non-point source pollution -- from all possible sources is an important focus of water quality protection and clean-up efforts throughout Virginia.

Within the farming and conservation community, soil and water conservation efforts have focused specifically on the implementation of best management practices (BMPs) to reduce soil loss and nutrient runoff (i.e., nitrogen (N) and phosphorus (P)) to local waterways, and leaching of nutrients to groundwater to control non-point source pollution. There are many different farming and conservation practices, but to actually protect water quality and gain ground in the cleanup of local waterways there are core practices that are foundational to farming and conservation in the 21st century.

Core Best Management Practices (BMPs):

- Cover soil with crops
- Exclude livestock from streams
- Keep riparian and streamside areas forested and vegetated as a buffer
- Use no-till or conservation tillage
- Develop and keep an up-to-date nutrient management plan
- Plan the whole-farm and conserve natural resources
- Avoid having any denuded lot or confined animal feeding sites
- Manage loafing lots and sacrifice lots to avoid nutrient accumulation and possible negative impact from concentrated flow of runoff.

The implementation of these core practices can also help farmers market their conservation efforts and help tell what the farm community is doing to protect water quality and Virginia's natural resources.

No matter the size of the operation, a starting point would be to obtain a recent aerial photo of your farm from the USDA Service Center and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office to better understand how your farming operation impacts and interacts with local waterways. An aerial photo can help you decide and prioritize which BMPs are most critical to implement to reduce nutrient and sediment impacts.

In some cases, the practices and solutions needed to reduce nutrient and sediment loads can be less obvious, but still have a huge impact. Installing proper guttering around the barn and high traffic areas for livestock is a simple practice for good soil and water conservation, but is sometimes overlooked as a practical common sense best management practice.

Management Page 11

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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 or call 434-292-5331

President's Message

Where Do We Go From Here?

These are exciting times for the forage industry. High prices for grains and other commodities have increased the potential value of Virginia's forages to cattle producers, the dairy industry, the horse industry, and other livestock segments. The value for hay, silages and other harvested forms of forages are also in great demand.

The question becomes, "How does the Virginia Forage and Grassland Council respond to the times we are in?" This was addressed at a recent Board of Directors meeting in September.

Before you look ahead sometimes you have to look back to see where you have been. In a nutshell the Virginia Forage and Grassland Council, according to a recent survey, is well respected by producers as an educational organization. Our conferences and Field Days have been well received and the programs have struck a good balance between demands for production and environmental concerns. The Virginia Council has almost 400 members and is also the largest of over 20 affiliates of the umbrella organization the American Forage and Grassland Council. The finances of the Virginia Forage and Grassland Council are currently strong and have improved dramatically over the past several years.

There also appears to be many opportunities to continue to serve the mission of the Virginia Forage and Grassland Council, which essentially is to promote Virginia's forage production agriculture. One common denominator of our discussions to better serve our members is greater member involvement. You may hear more about this at our upcoming Crops Conferences and Winter Grazing Conferences. There is much work to be done.

Finally I will briefly say that this will be my last President's message. A new President will be elected at our Board meeting in January. You have bestowed upon me a very special gift by allowing me to lead a great organization. So to all my friends and colleagues I will simply say "Thank you" for giving me the opportunity to serve. It has been a rewarding and enjoyable experience.

Best Regards,
Robert Shoemaker
President, VFGC

Maxwell Watkins recognized as 2012 Virginia Farmer of the Year

BLACKSBURG, Va., Oct. 26, 2012 – Virginia Cooperative Extension has selected Maxwell Watkins of Sutherland, Va., as the Virginia Farmer of the Year — an award that recognizes individual contributions to the commonwealth's agriculture industry.

Watkins, a sixth-generation farmer, was recognized at the Virginia Junior Livestock Expo in Harrisonburg on Oct. 13.

"We are pleased to honor Maxwell Watkins with this award," said Robert Grisso, associate director of agriculture and natural resources for Virginia Cooperative Extension. "He is an example of the enterprising spirit demonstrated through hard work on the farm and developing a startup business. His marketing and land conservation measures are examples of how farm enterprises will remain sustainable for the next six generations. His desire to partner with his two sons is a true inspiration."

Watkins, who operates Watkins Farm in partnership with his family, farms more than 2,800 acres — 2,700 acres rented and 115 acres owned. While soybeans, wheat, and flue-cured tobacco provide the bulk of his farm income, he also raises fescue and ladino clover for hay.

In past years, Watkins grew 80 acres of pumpkins. He also raised sheep and had a flock of about 200 ewes. During the 1990s, he stopped raising pumpkins and sheep to concentrate on his new cotton enterprise. He decided to forgo cotton this year in favor of corn and soybeans because they offered better prices. He is able to get in and out of cotton production because he relies on custom cotton harvesters.

"Maxwell has found success in diversifying his crops. He takes calculated risks, controls expenses, keeps his eyes on ever-changing market conditions, and lets nothing go to waste," said Grisso.

When Watkins recognized that some of the land he farms was better suited for grazing, he bought a beef herd of about 35 cows. He normally sells calves at 500 pounds, but when corn prices plummet, he harvests the corn for silage and feeds it to the calves to keep them a little longer.

"Environmental and market conditions dictate what I grow at any given time," Watkins said. "I will cut costs when I can, but I will not sacrifice yields and I don't ever cut corners."

Michael Parrish, Extension agent in Dinwiddie County, nominated Watkins for the award. Parrish admires the flexibility Watkins shows in being able to get in and out of enterprises such as sheep, pumpkins, and cotton when markets dictate. "Maxwell is a great role model for our younger farmers in Dinwiddie County. He has hosted field days, crop tours, and test plots on his farm during the past 17 years," said Parrish. "He and his family make the day-to-day farm work look easy, when we know it's not."

Watkins also owns and operates nonfarming sideline businesses. He contracts with the Virginia Department of Transportation to remove snow using his farm equipment. And in 2006, he and his family opened Watkins Outdoor Products, a retail dealership that sells farm and lawn equipment. "This business supports a real need in our area," he said. The business serves an urbanizing area where farmland has been converted to small farms, subdivisions, and homes on relatively large tracts.

A farmer for 35 years, Watkins grew his first crops at age 15. He knew he wanted to farm from an early age, and he still loves its rewards and challenges.

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Management from Page 3

For some farmers the idea of excluding cattle from streams as a way to control non-point source pollution can be contentious and controversial. Some landowners feel threatened by the idea and feel that the government would be infringing on their property rights since farmers have traditionally relied on ponds and streams to water their cattle. Others think it would be too costly or require too much management.

'An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.'~ Benjamin Franklin

For many farmers excluding livestock from streams and providing an alternative off-stream water source for their livestock is the right choice. It is also a way for them to market their farm and demonstrate their concerned about the environment and what they are doing to protect water quality. The subject of livestock exclusion evokes many emotions and passions within the farming and environmental community.

Farmers who have excluded their livestock from streams and installed alternative off-stream water sources have experienced other benefits from the practice such as:

- Increased forage utilization,
- Increased milk production and yield,
- Increased average daily gains,
- Reduced environmental mastitis,
- Eliminates a tremendous risk area for young calves,
- Fewer cases of foot rot,
- Fewer leg injuries,
- Fewer incidence of water borne diseases, and
- Improved livestock management making it easier to move animals to desired locations such as to the barn/pens.

The quality and cleanliness of the water source further distinguishes how livestock perform. It is important to remember all water sources have to be clean and properly managed to optimize livestock performance.

Why exclude livestock from streams?

The water quality benefits to the stream include the following:

- Improved streambank stability
- Reduced erosion and sediment transport
- Improved stream habitat
- Reduced bacteria concentrations
- Reduced nutrient concentrations.

The feasibility and acceptability of any management practice comes down finally to whether it is efficient, productive, and profitable for the farmer or landowner. Shortening the link from farm-to-table can be the catalyst for customers to understand what the costs and benefits are to protecting the environment. Adopting core best management practices for soil and water conservation will assist farmers in meeting the dual goals of being financially and environmentally competitive.

For more information about riparian buffers, watering systems, fencing, portable shade structures, shade trees, and best management practices, please contact your local Soil and Water Conservation District and Virginia Cooperative Extension Office for technical assistance and available cost-share and tax credit programs.

For Additional Reading:

Chesapeake Bay Funders Network. 2010. Adaptive Streambank Fencing Program: Context, steps and insights to help other communities replicate a successful program in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley. A publication of the Chesapeake Bay Funders Network.

Zeckoski, R, B. Benham, and C. Lunsford. 2007. Streamside Livestock Exclusion: A Tool for Increasing Farm Income and Improving Water Quality. Virginia Cooperative Extension publication 442-766.

Hoorman, J.J. and J. McCutcheon. 2005. Livestock and Streams: Best Management Practices to Control the Effects of Livestock Grazing Riparian Areas. Ohio State University Extension Fact Sheet LS-4-05.

Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation. 2012. Virginia Agricultural BMP Cost Share and Tax Credit Programs. Accessed at http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/stormwater_management/costshar.shtml

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Bay Watershed program, and the Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative and roll all under the RCPP. For the Senate bill, the CBO estimates total budget expenditures for RCPP as $36 million less than the existing programs over 2013-2022.

In addition, certain small but popular programs were reauthorized for 2013-2022. These programs are the Voluntary Public Access, Habitat Incentive Program and Terminal Lakes Assistance programs.

Conclusion

The Conservation Titles of the Agriculture Reform, Food and Jobs Act (ARFJ) of 2012 (S.3240) and the Federal Agriculture Reform and Risk Management Act (FARRM) of 2012 (HR. 6083) are quite similar. Both bills make organizational changes in the structure of conservation programs and reduce overall conservation spending by 11% over 2013-2022, but given the deficit-cutting fervor in Congress, the legislative results could have been much more severe for conservation programs. Whether the 2012 Farm Bill will be enacted in 2012 is still anyone's guess, but it is likely that the bi-partisan consensus of the House and Senate conservation proposals will be approved in the final reckoning.

Jim Pease, Professor (peasej@vt.edu), Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics Virginia Tech reprinted with permission .

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Making your Corn Silage Count

If you feed and rely on corn silage as an integral component of your dairy or beef ration, then you will not want to miss the 2012 VFGC Winter Crops Conferences. The focus of this year's events will be "Making your Corn Silage Count". With the volatile commodity and milk prices we have experienced in 2012 so far, and with no relief in sight for 2013, it will be critical that we as producers and managers do everything we can to get the most out of our corn silage. From harvesting to feeding, this conference will provide you with the most up to date and relevant information on hot topics such as: selecting the right hybrid for your acre; using the right forage analysis; the nuts and bolts of inoculants; impact of forage quality on ration costs; developing the most efficient rations; shred lage; VOC emmisions and many more. Speakers for this year's conferences include Dr. Limin Kung, corn silage expert from the University of Delaware; Dr. Virginia Ishler, expert in ration efficiency and cropping strategies to improve cash flow from the Pennsylvania State University; and Dr. Wade Thomason, corn and small grains extension specialist from Virginia Tech. We will also host a panel of nutritionists who will bring a wealth of information on improving ration efficiency in the face of high commodity prices.

There will be three opportunities to attend this year's conferences: December 5 in Dayton; December 6 in Rocky Mount and December 7 in Wytheville. Be looking for a flyer in the mail soon with specific locations and directions. The conference will also have a substantial trade show component, with vendors on hand to visit with you about your needs and answer your questions about their products. If you would like to help sponsor this event please contact either Marnie Caldwell (marniecaldwell@gmail.com) or Brian Jones (brian.jones@pioneer.com) for more information.

Winter is coming and it will soon be time to start feeding hay. Are you ready?

By: Brian Campbell

Before you start feeding hay there are several important questions that you need to answer. First, who will be eating the hay? Second, what type of hay will be fed? Will it meet the nutritional requirements of the cows? If not, will supplements be needed?

Who will be eating the hay? The quality and quantity of hay needed to maintain animals will depend on the size of the cow as well as the stage of production. A larger cow will require more hay but can be fed lower quality hay as she can eat enough to meet her nutritional requirements. A smaller cow will require fewer pounds of hay but will need hay with a higher nutrient content. The stage of production will also change nutrientional requirements. If your cows are dry and pregnant they will have a much lower nutrient requirement than ones that are lactating.

The next question is what type of hay do you have and will it meet the nutrient requirements of your cows? The only way to know about the quality of your hay is to have it tested. There is more variation within a type of hay than there is between types of hay. The stage of maturity when the hay was harvested is very important. Once you know who will be eating the hay and the nutritional value of the hay, you can determine if it will meet your cows' requirements. If it won't, you need to determine

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