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 cents for their livestock operations.

This year’s keynote speaker is Jim Gerrish of American GrazingLands 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, inventoring 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 farmers with knowledge of profitability differences of grazing systems including spring versus fall calving and the cost of grazing verses 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 run from 8:30 am to 3:15 pm and be held at the following locations:

- Warren County Community Center, Front Royal
- Weyers Cave Community Center, Weyers Cave
- Wytheville Meeting Center, Wytheville
- Southern Piedmont AREC, Blackstone
- Student Registration $15.00 per student

Harlan White Scholarship Fund Amount $50.00 early registration per attendee After January 3, 2013 $50.00 late registration per attendee Early registration must be post marked before January 3, 2013

Make Check Payable to: VFGC

Mail Check and Registration to: 2013 Winter Forage Conference Margaret Kenny 3599 Indian Oak Road Crewe, VA 23930

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 National Resources Conservation Service are also sponsoring the conference. To visit the VFGC web site (http://vfarges.com) for additional details and registration information.

Program Registration

No refunds for cancellation before January 3, 2013

Name ______________________________
Name ______________________________
Address ______________________________
County ______________________________
Daytime Phone ______________________________
Email ______________________________

Check which meeting you will attend: 
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Conservation page 11

Comparison of Current House and Senate Conservation Proposals

By: Jim Pease

The Senate passed the Agriculture Reform, Food and Jobs Act (ARFA) 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 (FARM) 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. Consensus among the titles of the bills is still not at the level that may be possible before the end of the 2008 Farm Bill. In the Senate bill, the CBO estimates spending in the new program at $809 million more than the existing programs would spend over 2013-2012.

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 is the largest Working Lands program under the 2008 Farm Bill, with budget authority of $7.325 billion between FY2008-FY2012. EQIP is reauthorized 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 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 reauthorized 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 1% 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 that 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 bill repeals 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 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 Bay Program, the Farm Bill and with budget authority of $7.325 billion between FY2008-FY2012. EQIP is reauthorized 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 wildlife habitat protection practices in a manner similar to those of the repealed Wildlife Habitat Incentives (WHIP) program.

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Some Economics of Backpack and Handgun Spot Spraying

By: Blox Daughtery

For controlling unwanted plants in pastures and in forerecords, 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 control fenceline to foliage of red cedar trees, buckbrush (coralberry, devil’s shoestring), multilora rose, bush (busharian) 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 1/4 – 1/3 % surfactant to Surmount or Grazon + Remedy, and 3/4 % surfactant to PastureGard):

2% Surmount: Use 10.25 oz 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 cent per plant).

Grazon + 1/3% Ultra: Requires 10.25 oz of Grazon and 2.56 oz of 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).

PastureGard: Requires 3.0 oz of PastureGard and 3.0 oz of Remedy in four gallons of water. PastureGard was purchased at about $0.51 per ounce, 10.25 oz = $5.23, which used on 500 to 600 plants equates to $0.0087 to $0.01 per plant (averages 9.5 cents per plant).

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 many 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 between 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 stockpiled grass.

Grazing pastures that contain warm-season grasses first. Although we often 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.

Grazing pastures containing clover next. We are always happy to see clover survive winter, 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 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 electrically 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 only gets pretty fast and the payback 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 payback is much better.

No pasture too big or small

Whether you have a small pasture or a large, home dairy or beef pasture, Southern States has the right forage seed, fertilizer and weed-control products to keep your pastures in top production.

Be more effective with advice from a Southern States GreenMaster professional and let profitability become a result.

By: Dr. Vitalis Temu

Contact your nearest Southern States dealer for an appointment today!
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 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 gain rates 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 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 carefully 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 will pay additional dollars 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 Dhyveder at Kansas State University finds this to be true in his study found at www.agronogy.info when they examine 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 profit.

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

Grower available at http://www.progressiveforage.com/

Bioenergy: Is there an ideal crop?

By: John Fike

“Agroforestry” is a mash up of a couple of ideas: “agri” refers to agronomy and its attendant issues, and “culture”, which subsumes all of the why’s 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 deal with new production practices and the student literature 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 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 problems, it would reduce the exposure of livestock to alkaloids during the summer months. This has been the basis of promoting switching, 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 may 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 varieties” 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. 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 re-search... development. Along with his impact on DOE, Dr. Wolf helped get switchgrass planted around Virginia, and many farms have 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.

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PhytoGen cottonseed or a $500 donation to a designated charity on behalf of Dow AgroSciences. Each farmer and nominator also received a Columbia Cathedral Peak fleece vest, courtesy of Ivey's Outdoor and Farm Supply of Albany, Ga.

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 essential 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 need, the need for 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 hoofed 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. This 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.

Why Best Management Practices?
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 agricultural industry.

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

“When Watkins recognized that some of the land he farms was better suited for grazing, he bought a 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 has 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 don't think it's a piece of cake."

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 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."

For more information about riparian buffers, cotton enterprise. He decided to forgo cotton this year in favor of corn and soybeans. He loves its rewards and challenges. Maxwell Watkins recognized as 2012 Virginia Farmer of the Year
Summer is coming and it will soon be time to start feeding hay. Are you ready? 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 nutritional 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 nutritional requirements of the cows? If not, what will you do? Will you need to purchase additional hay? Will you need to supplement the hay with other feeds? 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 what you will do.