

2013 VFGC Winter Forage Conference Pictures



Jim Gerrish , speaker visiting with one of the attendees.



Gordon Groover and Greg Halich visiting during a break at the Weyers Cave Conference.



Participants visiting during a break at the Weyers Cave location.



Jim Gerrish explaining slides to participant at the Wytheville meeting.



Future VFGC members, Collin and Sam Teutsch at the Blackstone conference.



Attendees learning about grazing winter pastures at the Weyers Cave location.



Participant visiting King's AgriSeeds rep Blair Saunders during lunch at the Weyers Cave location.



David Fiske registering a participant at the Weyers Cave location.



E. N. Garnett , VFGC Board member, visiting with participants.



Participant visiting with Renee from Timeless Fence Systems Plastic Innovations during a break.



J. B. Daniel, State Agronomist for the NRCS and VFGC Board member visits with a participant at the Weyers Cave Conference.



Jane Graham and Robert Shoemaker, President of the VFGC visiting during the Wytheville meeting.

AFGC National Tour May 22-24, 2013



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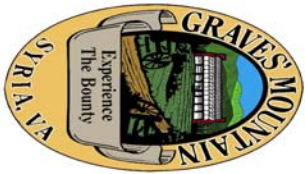


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- Tour stops at successful operations with hands on presentations
- The AFGC National Hay Contest
- Networking opportunities designed to keep you connected with your peers
- Specialized Guest Tour




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Danny rotates 3 separate herds over 30 permanent paddocks and further subdivides with portable fencing during certain times of the year. He has a cow/calf operation but also raises weaned calves on pasture to finish 60-80 calves on forage each year. The fencing and water system improvements and intensive grazing management have resulted in benefits to soil health, water quality, forage stand density and vigor, as well as his value-added, grass-fed beef products marketed to restaurants and universities. Danny’s on-farm production and conservation improvements have been shared during local meetings and field days through his partnership in local Cat-



lemen’s Association, Extension programs, VFGC events, and currently as a local mentor for the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Program though Va Tech. His dedication to conservation, service and community resulted in Danny being a charter member of Grayson Landcare, Inc., a non-profit organization made up of local members working together on conservation projects that contribute to the environmental, social, and economic benefit of Grayson County and the local Appalachian region. Danny’s core beliefs in conserving productive farmland for future generations led him to establish a permanent easement on his home farm of 145 acres in 2011.

The practical application of grazing management techniques, the diversity of his production and marketing system, the stewardship of the natural resources of owned and leased land and his dedicated service to the local agricultural community and the forage industry in VA make Danny Boyer a truly exceptional winner of this prestigious award.



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White Award from front Page

many cases behind the scenes to organize and carryout the high quality winter forage conferences that Virginia producers have become accustomed to. Past conferences have featured speakers like Jim Gerrish, Harlan Hughes, Temple Grandin, Fred Provenza, and Cathy Voth. These conferences have consistently received high reviews from producers around the state.

Dr. Groover is hard working, dedicated, and truly committed as both a researcher and extension specialist. His technical expertise in the area of farm business management coupled with outstanding communication skills makes him a highly effective educator. His sincere interest and a strong passion to help Virginia producers improve and expand the efficient utilization of forages for profitable ruminant livestock production has enabled him to reach a level of performance few extension specialists ever achieve. In the past several years, Dr. Groover has received numerous awards for service to Virginia’s agricultural sector, with the most recent being the Andy Swiger Land Grant Award.

Since Dr. Groover’s career embodied the dedication and commitment that Dr. Harlan White had to Virginia’s forage and livestock industry, it is only fitting that Dr. Gordon Groover receive the Virginia Forage and Grassland Council’s highest honor, the Harlan E. White Distinguished Service Award. Dr. Groover resides in Blacksburg Virginia with his wife Velva and their cats.



Dr. Gordon Groover, recipient of the Virginia Forage and Grassland Council’s highest honor, the Harlan E. White Distinguished Service Award, poses for pictures with Robert Shoemaker, current President of the Virginia Forage and Grassland Council.

Winter Forage Conferences Highlight Theory and Practice

Gordon Groover

During the week of January 22-25, the Virginia Forage and Grasslands Council presented their Winter Forage Conferences focusing on the theory and practice of “Kicking the Hay Habit.” The keynote speaker was Jim Gerrish of American GrazingLands Services, making his way East from Idaho. Jim illustrated the tradeoffs and costs farmers must consider when producing, storing and feeding hay to animals throughout the winter. He compared hay feeding costs to the costs and added nutritional benefit of winter grazing and stockpiled forages. His key point was livestock farmers must know and track their supply of forages throughout the year and match that supply to animal demand. He encourage farmers to understand the tradeoffs between increasing total herd size (and the required hay feeding) in an attempt to increase profits verses matching herd size to the forage supply, thus capitalizing on the lower costs of year round grazing.



Greg Halich, Agricultural Economist at the University of Kentucky helped participants understand the how to calculate and compare daily costs of grazing and hay making. His examples pointed out the need to include costs of all inputs, the obvious, fertilizer, lime, fuel, and the less obvious, land and labor. This well documented example yields a total per cow costs per grazing day of \$1.07. On the hay making side he developed estimates of making hay from out-of-pocket costs (fertilizer) to valuing machinery, labor and land charges. These calculations yielded total costs of \$112 per ton . He calculated hay feeding yielding an estimated of \$1.39 per cow day. All total, for every extra day of grazing a farmer would save \$0.19 per cow day. These assumptions were expanded in to more detailed analysis with varying rates of hay feeding, stockpiling and use of summer annuals to explore profitability of each system. Farmers were encouraged to explore their own estimates and understand the total costs of their currently system.

J.B. Daniel, NRCS Forage and Grassland Agronomist presented information on how to make the vision of rotational grazing come to life on the landscape. He focused on the proper design of fences and water systems to meet the needs of the targeted livestock throughout the year. Kicking the hay habit, requires embracing well planned fence and water systems to achieve a profitable animal-forage management system.

At each of the four location participants got to hear from producers that were putting these concepts in to action.

Monira Rifaat spoke in Front Royal explaining how she manages her 107 acres of pastures for 50 cows that rotationally graze 12 paddocks. Her objective is to achieve year round grazing and only feeding supplemental forages when drought or deep snow reduce animal access to standing forage. She makes use of conservation programs that have supported her livestock management strategies with 80 acres entered in the CREP program protecting streams with buffers.



Peter Hosteller was the cattle producer presenting at Weyers Cave. On his Shenandoah Valley farm he reduced stocking rates with the clear objective to increase profits. Even though he had reduced calf sales his total costs savings more than made up for the lower income. His reduced stocking rate is matched up with rotational grazing and stockpiling tall fescues for winter grazing. His fine-tuned grazing practices and reduced stocking rate have paid off in savings of labor and increased profits.

In Wytheville Terry Slusher spoke about his farming operation explaining how he develops budget, tracking his actual costs of feeding hay and grazing. He operates three farms subdivide into paddocks to support intensive grazing, he routinely achieves more than 300 days of grazing per year. He has consistently shown that he has saved money by increasing the days he can graze instead of feeding hay.

At the Blackstone Conference Keith Tuck spoke about this Bedford county farm. He has worked with the local SWCD and



NRCS to fence out waterways and ponds to implement management rotational grazing and stockpiled tall fescue, reducing his months of hay feeding.

2013 VFGC Awards recipients were:
- Danny Boyer recognized as VFGC Outstanding Forage Producer of the Year.

- Gordon Groover was recognized as the VFGC Harlan White Distinguished Service Award.

- Margaret Kenny was recognized by the VFGC Board of Directors for her outstanding service as Administrative Assistant to the VFGC.

Cattle Comes to Southern Piedmont AREC

The Virginia Tech Southern Piedmont Agricultural Research and Extension Center was established by the 1972 General Assembly of Virginia for the purpose of providing strong, commodity-oriented agricultural research and extension programs for the 21 counties of Virginia’s Southern Piedmont Region. Our mission is to provide multidisciplinary, comprehensive research and educational programs to support the sustainability of agriculture in Virginia.



In 2005, 172 acres of forested land was harvested. One-half the acreage was cleared with a Tigercat M724D mulcher and the remaining acreage was cleared by grubbing and burning. Lime, fertilizer, and biosolids were applied in 2007. A cover crop of rye and tall fescue was sown and a fixed knot high tensile perimeter fence was installed.



Infrastructure was needed to create grazing systems and develop educational programs that are specifically designed to meet the needs of forage and livestock producers in Southside. A grant titled “Grazing into the Future: Improving the Economic Viability of Ruminant Livestock Operations in Southside Virginia” was awarded to SPAREC in January 2010 by the Virginia Tobacco Indemnification and Community Revitalization Commission (TICRC) for development of infrastructure of the forage-livestock area. A centralized cattle handling facility, two ponds, a well, spring development, livestock lanes, stream crossings, mirafount energy free livestock waterers, and interior fencing have been installed. All pastures were established with MaxQ Tall fescue and will be over seeded with clovers. To develop this infrastructure and grazing areas 1.2 million dollars have been invested in the development of the new livestock facility.

The overarching objective of the forage/livestock program is to develop and extend grazing systems that are specifically designed for Southside. These novel and improved grazing systems will be implemented at the farm level through a multi-pronged educational effort. These objectives will be accomplished by initiating long-term landscape-scale, multi-



institutional, interdisciplinary forage/livestock systems research and educational programs. The understanding of management intensity on soil physical and chemical characteristics, soil microbial communities, plant productivity and composition, and animal productivity in grassland ecosystems will be enhanced by these programs. We will specifically evaluate alternative forage species and varieties of forages, increase forage use efficiency by grazing livestock, and evaluate alternative feeds and grazing management strategies including silvopasture and grass finished beef. Our goal is to enhance profitability and environmental sustainability of ruminant livestock operations in the southeastern United States.

The first cattle have begun grazing in the new livestock area. Our first study is investigating forage utilization of stockpiled tall fescue by stocker steers. We are strip grazing the pastures and have three treatments. This study will be helpful in providing data for beef producers in the southern piedmont of Virginia as to how many more grazing days can be obtained with strip grazing rather than continual grazing of stockpiled tall fescue.



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Soil Page 2

According to Mr. Jones, NRCS, Soil and Water Conservation District, and Virginia Cooperative Extension staffers throughout Virginia are working with landowners to improve soil and water resources. Staff members are available to for advice, technical and financial assistance, and education programs, free of charge. So whether you're a farmer, a researcher, a conservationist or an interested citizen, the information on this site will help you “Unlock the Secrets in the Soil.”



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Do High Grain Prices Reduce Livestock Profitability?

This question has been asked many times in recent conversations. An obvious yes answer would be in order for poultry and swine producers. Perhaps the answer is not so simple for cattle operations or other operators that fully appreciate the value of forages.

The short and simple answer is that increased demand for grain products by competing interests, reduced supply due to US drought and anticipated dry conditions in the major US production areas has increased grain prices. Simple math leads to increased costs of gain when grain is the only nutritional supply. So the swine and poultry folks are painted in a corner and their only saving grace will be increased price caused by increased demand for their product.

Producers that can rely on forages have to decipher an economic model with many moving parts. Years ago when grain prices were low there wasn't a lot of price differential per head between 5 weights and 8 weight steers. Obviously we could put on cheap gains with cheap grain. This isn't the case now and the feeders are willing to pay folks some premium for heavier weight cattle and therefore it pays to hold cattle and put on cheap gains with forage. (Or put in the pessimistic sense that they are discounting us more for lighter weight cattle).

Cattle inventories are down. This is probably in large part due to drought in the western United States. Some folks I've talked to in Texas have indicated that many large cattle ranches won't come back regardless of increased future rainfall. To some extent though I can't help but believe that some of the liquidation has come about by operations that have failed to recognize the increased cost of production by the use of expensive mechanically harvested forages and continued use heavy amounts of grain in the operation.

So this begs another question. Have high cost producers finally been weaned out of the market and do producers that utilize low cost forages survive another day to enjoy high beef prices caused by lower cattle inventories? Certainly drought has been so severe in some parts of the Country that even low cost producers can't survive. No matter how well you manage your forages it needs to rain sooner or later or you're out of grass. Without rain even the best of us run out of rabbits to pull out of our hat.

Those that do survive these trying economic times and rely on low-cost forages may actually become more profitable in spite of record high grain prices. Jim Gerrish spoke at our recent Winter Conferences and essentially stated that with increased grain prices and input costs that we cannot live in the economic paradigm of the 1970's when input costs were relatively cheap. Reduced livestock inventories should lead to higher prices and much of the increased cost of production can be reduced by low cost well managed forage systems. Those that learn to profit during our current economic scenario of high grain prices will come at the expense of those that didn't.

Best Regards,
Robert Shoemaker
President, VFGC

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Dennis Jones, Conservationist at the Farmville USDA Service Center, is emphasizing that soil is a living and life-giving substance, without which we would perish.

A quote from the USDA-NRCS Soil Health webpage states, “As the world population and food production demands rise, keeping our soil healthy and productive is of paramount importance. So much so that we believe improving the health of our Nation’s soil is one of the most important endeavors of our time.

By focusing more attention on soil health and by educating our customers and the public about the positive impact healthy soils can have on productivity and conservation, we can help our Nation's farmers and ranchers feed the world more profitably and sustainably – now and for generations to come."

A website is made available by the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service for landowners, teachers, students, farmers. The resources on this soil health web site are designed to help visitors understand the basics and benefits of soil health – and to learn about Soil Health Management Systems from farmers who are using those systems, check it out at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/soils/health/>.

Virginia Adopts Strategy to Address Potential Water Quality Concerns

Contact: Bill Hayden (DEQ), (804) 698-4447

Elaine J. Lidholm (VDACS), (804) 786-7686

RICHMOND, VA. -- The Department of Environmental Quality and the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) will be implementing a new strategy to proactively address potential water quality concerns that may arise on small farms that raise livestock and poultry in a concentrated area. These may include dairies, feedlots, poultry operations and other types of farms.

The strategy builds on existing state programs to help meet Virginia's water quality goals, and it offers an alternative to additional regulatory requirements. It is not a one-size-fits-all regulation but is site specific and allows flexibility based on the type of operation, the physical site, the type and number of livestock and other factors.

“DEQ and VDACS have collaborated on the development of this strategy by which small animal feeding operations will be evaluated for site-specific risks or impacts to water quality,” DEQ Director David K. Paylor said. “It allows us to be flexible when addressing these concerns and puts a top priority on voluntary solutions.”

“We are in favor of this approach that takes into account the many variables of a smaller animal feeding operation,” added VDACS Commissioner Matt Lohr. “Additional regulations may be unnecessarily burdensome on many farmers, but a voluntary assessment strategy will provide better guidance when addressing water quality issues.”

The strategy, which originally was piloted on six farms in the Shenandoah Valley, emphasizes voluntary implementation of best management practices, or BMPs, to address risks or impacts to water quality that may originate from a confined livestock or poultry farm. BMPs are methods or techniques found to be the most effective and practical means in achieving an objective, in this case, clean water.

DEQ estimates there are approximately 800 such farms in Virginia to be assessed in the next three years. These farms are lots or facilities where animals are confined and fed for 45 days or more in any 12-month period, and crops or vegetation are not sustained in the normal growing season.

DEQ is contacting farm owners and operators to discuss the strategy and to schedule onsite assessments. If an onsite assessment identifies water quality risks or impacts, agency staff will work cooperatively with the farm owner or operator to establish a plan and schedule to address the water quality concern.

The Virginia Dairymen's Association supports this new approach. Eric Paulson, Executive Secretary, said, "Dairy farmers in Virginia have long been stewards of the land. This flexible approach by DEQ and VDACS will help to maintain water quality and dairy farm viability. It will also serve to highlight many of the best management practices that farmers have implemented voluntarily. Avoiding burdensome regulations will allow dairy farm families to remain in business while also promoting water quality."

More information is available on the DEQ website at www.deq.virginia.gov.

Margaret Kenny Recognized for Outstanding Service

The Virginia Forage and Grassland Council recognized Margaret Kenny for her continued outstanding service to the VFGC at this winter's statewide forage conference in Blackstone. Margaret is a resident of Nottoway County and shares the work on the family beef cattle farm with her Father and Husband. Margaret is currently the Administrative and Office Specialist III at the Southern Piedmont Agriculture Research and Extension Center at Blackstone. She has been with the Southern Piedmont Center for over 16 years. Margaret has served the VFGC for 10 years and is currently the Managing Editor for VFGC's quarterly publication, the Forager, Webmaster for the VFGC Website, and Administrative Assistant to the VFGC Board of Directors.

Margaret is responsible for tracking membership and publishing meeting notice's, she handles registration for all the Council meetings, tours, and conferences. She composes the Forager, edits articles, coordinates



with the printer, and follows up on its distribution to the membership. Margaret keeps the VFGC Website updated with planned events and links to additional information and resources. Margaret is organized and professional, kind and caring, and hard working. While many people contribute to the success of the VFGC, Margaret's diligent work is a major factor in our success. Taking care of all the little details is a big thing when delivering high quality programs, and Margaret is the person doing this for the VFGC.

When asked to comment on her work with the VFGC Margaret said, "Working with the VFGC has given me the opportunity to meet a lot of farmers and educators. I have learned so much from these people and been able to use some of it on our family farm".

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Spring 2013

Danny Boyer Named 2013 Outstanding Forage Producer of the Year

One highlight of this year's Winter Forage Conference was to see Danny Boyer of Fries, VA, named the 2013 Outstanding Forage Producer of the Year. The award plaque was presented with a \$500 cash award provided by Evergreen Seed in Rice, Virginia. Danny has spent the last 37 years developing and improving his forage-livestock system as well as working many of those years as a Conservation Technician with the USDA Soil Conservation Service. He was inspired by Foy Hendrick's in the early 1980's, then mentored by Harlan White and Paul Peterson from Va Tech and his accomplishments are something to be admired. His 210 acres of grazed pastureland include his home farm as well as 3 rented farms. He based his success on a systems management approach starting with good soil fertility and using grazing management to maintain surface residue, manage for 30%+ legumes in the stand, achieve high forage utilization efficiencies, and keep quality forage in front of his livestock throughout the year.



Danny Boyer with Robert Shoemaker VFGC president.

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Dr. Gordon Groover Receives the Harlan E. White Distinguished Service Award

The Virginia Forage and Grassland Council awarded Dr. Gordon Groover its highest honor, the "Harlan White Distinguished Service Award" at this winter's statewide forage conferences. This award memorializes the life of Dr. Harlan White, who had a long and distinguished career serving as Extension Forage Specialist at Virginia



Tech and was founder of the Virginia Forage and Grassland Council.

Dr. Groover, who is currently an Associate Professor in the Agricultural & Applied Economics Department at Virginia Tech, started his career with Virginia Cooperative Extension as an extension agent in Culpepper in 1979. He moved to campus in the 1980s where he worked as an extension economist in the Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics. He completed his master's and doctorate degrees in 1988 and 2001 respectively.

Dr. Groover's primary areas of responsibility include coordination of the statewide farm business management program, integration of farm business management extension and research projects, integration of research and extension projects in management intensive grazing and economics of forage systems, coordination of the Virginia Use Value for Land in Agriculture and Horticultural Uses, multi-state extension and research activities, and to assist in bringing the Center for Farm and Agribusiness Management to life.

Dr. Groover's research and educational programs have a strong applied slant making him an ideal educational advisor to the VFGC Board. In this capacity he works tirelessly and in

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Reporting the progress of Virginia's forage industry