



## VIRGINIA FORAGE AND GRASSLAND COUNCIL

3599 Indian Oak Road  
Crewe, Virginia 23930  
434-645-9639

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The Virginia Forage and Grassland Council concluded 2012 with a series of strategic planning sessions, where the board reaffirmed its' belief that first and foremost, VFGC is an education organization. We started 2013 putting those ideas into practice. Like most states, Virginia has a wide range of geographies and economic bases, and providing relevant information can be a logistical challenge. We were faced with maintaining our independence and integrity as an organization, while expanding our reach. What's more we had to do it without overextending our resources - either financial or staff. This became possible by hosting our usual events, and by taking greater advantage of sponsorship opportunities with other organizations. By using our existing alliances with state and federal organizations, corporate sponsors and with other non-profit organizations we were able to support and participate in a wider variety of formats, at different locations, focusing on very specific topics.

Beef production has always been the core of our efforts, and that continued into 2013, starting off in January with our Winter Beef Conferences. This is a series of four single-day conferences, this year featuring Jim Gerrish. Jim's message of cost savings through forage production was extended into July, when he led three single-day sessions of the Advanced Grazing School.

Joining with the Augusta Extension Office on several half-day sessions gave us an opportunity to help offer more targeted programs. Some producers found that morning sessions, like the Fall Grazed Cover Crops Field Meeting were easier to fit into their schedules. An evening Fescue Meeting, with the Virginia Cattleman's Association, was a well-received, topic specific meeting. The Grassfed Beef Marketing Workshop consisted of a morning session at one location, and an identical evening session thirty miles from the first.

Providing academic and financial support to college students is another way to expand our reach to a whole new group of forage researchers and managers. Five Virginia Tech students attended the Ecology of Grazing Lands with the help of VFGC sponsorships. We awarded the 2013 Harlan White Scholarship to VT senior Kristen Ulmer of Broadway, Va. and contributed funds to offset the costs associated with on-farm programs in the Department of Crop and Soil Environmental Sciences at Virginia Tech.

Our series of three one-day fencing schools offered fencing solutions not only for beef producers, but for small-ruminant producers as well. The inaugural running of our Beginning Grazier Schools was so well received that a second running was offered in November, and it too filled up quickly. These two-day schools appealed not only to beginning farmers, but also to long time livestock owners who are looking to make changes in their land and livestock management.

We held two Summer Forage Tours, the first focusing on Native Warm Season Grasses. It was an opportunity to learn more about their benefits to pollinators from Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute researchers. Our second session focused on integrating purchased feed into a grazing dairy.

Over 30 horse owners attended the March Equine Conference, held in Blackstone.

Because of our proximity to Washington D.C., Virginia is at the forefront of water quality policy. This increased scrutiny affords us an opportunity to highlight the benefits forage brings to livestock production and to land management. VFGC has been active in establishing policy at the state level on noxious weeds, and at the state and national level on the integration of conservation practices and livestock production.

Our efforts to promote the benefits of forage-based agriculture were substantiated in several large ways in 2013. First, we were honored to host the 2014 AFGC National Tour in May of this year. Forage managers from across the nation attended the three-day conference at Graves Mountain Lodge, in Syria, Virginia. In addition, we were awarded a Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) by NRCS to further our educational efforts, and in November, we were named the Conservationist of the Year by the Virginia Chapter of the Soil and Water Conservation Society “for exceptional service in advancing the science and art of good land and water use. “

Communicating our vision and priorities remains a challenge. In addition to our web page, and the Forager, our quarterly newsletter, we’ve added Facebook and Twitter, and as part of our CIG, we’ll be adding a YouTube channel that will help us promote the utilization of forages to improve the economic and social well-being of all Virginians

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia Johnson, President

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