

2015 Virginia Forage and Grassland Accomplishment Report

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2015 has proven to be a very productive year. Forage educational activity outreach has touched over three thousand forage enthusiasts from Virginia, W.VA, Maryland and North Carolina. This has been accomplished through the utilization of Winter Forage Conferences, Equine Conferences, Summer Field Days, Conservation Initiative Grants (CIG), CIG on Farm grazing system implementation and demonstrations, and a quarterly newsletter. These efforts have not been done alone. The Virginia Forage and Grassland Council (VFGC) has partnered with Virginia Cooperative Extension, USDA Natural Resources and Conservation Service, VA Department of Conservation, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, and sponsorship by numerous national, state, and local agricultural companies.

Winter Forage Conferences “Red Meat Forages, and Human Health” was the theme for the 2015 VFGC Winter Forage Conferences, based on the numbers it was a subject of interest to many. Attendance totaled approximately 520 for the four venues across the state. Peter J. Ballerstedt, PhD, Forage Production Manager for Barenbrug USA was the keynote speaker. Dr. Ballerstedt’s presentation focused on dietary policy in the United States and its negative economic impact on livestock farmers. Dr. Ballerstedt also spoke to the topic “Red Meat is Green”, Adele Hite, a Registered Dietitian focused her presentation on how the U.S. Dietary Guidelines came to be and how they are flawed. Participants rated the conferences as very useful and local and agricultural media press reported very positively to the information and the effectiveness of the conferences. In nine months, You Tube has received 1,170 additional viewers of this conference.

Summer Field Days Four Summer Field Days were held across the state. The themes varied for each one. The themes were: “Using Forage Crops and Grazing Management to Build Soil Health and Extend the Grazing System”, “Tools & Technologies for Better Grazing”, “Hay Production and Summer Forages”, “Forage Utilization in a Diverse Livestock Operation”. The topic of “Soil Health” was included at all four locations. Other topics varied by location and included, but were not limited to: “Fencing Strategies, Construction and the Use of Temporary Fencing”, “Water System Development”, “Grazing and Forage Management”, “Making High Quality Balage”, and “Effective Pasture Renovation and Benefits Derived”. Topics were covered by host producers, local and state experts from VCE, NRCS, and Private Agricultural Consultants. Nationally prominent experts included Mr. Ray Archuleta, Dr. Gary Bates and Dr. Dan Undersander. A total of 575 participants attended these Summer Field Days. Evaluation results have been very positive to the usefulness of the all the topics presented. The information provided has already been taken back to farms by those in attendance and is being used in an effective and positive manner to increase production and profitability.

Equine Conferences “The Usefulness of Forages in Equine Operations” was the basic theme of two conferences held across the state. Funding was provided from a twenty-five-hundred-dollar grant from the VA Horse Industry Council. Topics included “Identifying Forage Species”, “Pasture Management”, “Enhancing Forage Utilization Using Temporary Fencing”, “Forages Role and Value in Meeting the Nutritional Needs of the Horse”. Survey results witnessed a very positive acceptance to information presented. The participants showed an appreciation for the forage component and learning more about the true value of forages as related to the proper care and management of horses. A total of approximately 95 people attended the two conferences.

Conservation Initiative Grants (CIG) The VFGC completed the second year of a USDA-NRCS Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) for “Improving Soil Health through Grazing Management: Putting Science into Practice”. VFGC has used this grant to demonstrate good grazing management on multiple farms and measure changes in soil health and pasture productivity and then communicate these changes to the agricultural community through field days, case studies and winter conferences. All four demo farms are being run by participants of earlier VFGC Beginning Grazing Schools presented in 2014. Also, as a part of this grant, VFGC put together the fifth edition of the Virginia Graziers’ Planner as an educational and outreach tool. This tool was distributed to 4,000 graziers across the state providing a monthly checklist of timely activities, conservation, extension and animal science tips and showcasing forage and grassland photos from across VA each month.

The VFGC has also partnered with the Chesapeake Bay Foundation as a sub-awardee on another CIG agreeing to host 2-day grazing schools and summer forage field days over the next 3 years and recruiting 15 farmers to convert at least 600 acres of pasture to improved grazing management.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) VFGC is a collaborating partner on the Chesapeake Bay Foundation application for an RCPP grant through USDA. The goal is to pool financial assistance dollars to grassland farmers in the Chesapeake Bay watershed of Virginia, to facilitate and assist in grazing system development and implementation on farm in this region.

Web Site VFGC continues to maintain a web site at vaforges.org. The website has proven to be beneficial in getting useful information out to forage enthusiast in the areas of forage production, forage research, and state and national forage news and events.

Newsletter VFGC continued to publish four Quarterly Newsletters. “The Forager” is mailed to the membership and posted on the VFGC Web Site. These newsletters assist in disseminating timely forage information, as well as conference and field day updates and advertising.

Harlan White Scholarship AFGC presented one five-hundred-dollar scholarship to Gordon B. Jones who is a student in the Crop and Environmental Science Department at Virginia Tech. This scholarship is given annually to honor Dr. White whose positive impact as an Extension Forage Specialist not only enhanced forage production across Virginia, but the lives of all he worked and came in contact with.

VFGC Awards The Forage Producer of the Year Award was presented to Andy McIntire of McIntire Cattle Company. VFGC also sponsored Jon Repair to attend the 2015 AFGC Meeting and to represent Virginia in the Forage Spokesperson Contest.

AFGC Awards Two VFGC members received awards at the 2015 AFGC Annual Meeting. Mr. Robert Shoemaker was presented the AFGC Merit Award. Dr. Chris Tuetsch was presented the AFGC Medallion Award.

2017 AFGC Annual Meeting Plans are well under way by both AFGC and VFGC to host this meeting in Roanoke, Virginia on January 10 thru 12, 2017.