

2016 Virginia Forage and Grassland Accomplishment Report

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2016 has once again been a successful year working with and educating forage producers across the state of Virginia. Forage educational activity outreach has touched over thirty-five hundred 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 Forage Producers, 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 “Understanding and Managing Tall Fescue in Grazing Systems” was the theme for the 2016 VFGC Winter Forage Conferences. This effort produced probably the best nationally “Fescue” based conference. Attendance totaled approximately 620 at the four venues across the state. Nationally recognized experts Dr. Glen Aiken, Dr. Joe Bouton, Dr. Craig Roberts and Dr. John Andrae presented the topics of “Seedhead Suppression”, “Novel Endophyte Tall Fescue: Opportunities and Challenges”, “T-Snip Testing” and “Integrated Approach to Managing Tall Fescue”. Forage Producer of the Year C.J. Isabel presented how he and his family utilize forages in their diverse livestock and poultry operation. Participants rated the conferences as very useful and local and regional agricultural media press reported very positively to the information and the effectiveness of the conferences. In ten months, You Tube has received 1,750 additional viewers of this conference.

Field Days Two Field Days were held across the state. The themes for each were: “Using Forage Crops and Grazing Management to Build Soil Health and Extend the Grazing System”, “Tools & Technologies for Better Grazing”, “The Use of Temporary Fencing”, “Water System Development”, and “Effective Pasture Renovation and Benefits Derived”. Topics were covered by host producers, local and state experts from VCE, NRCS, and Agricultural Consultants. A total of 325 participants attended these two 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 “Horse Hay Quality and Weed Control for Pastures and Hay Fields” was the basic theme for three conferences held across the state. Funding was provided thru a twenty-five-hundred-dollar grant from the VA Horse Industry Council. Topics included “Selecting High Quality Hay”, “Pasture and Hay Field Weed Management Options”, “Forages Role and Value in Meeting the Nutritional Needs of the Horse”. Survey results witnessed a very positive acceptance to information presented. The participants certainly gained an appreciation for the forage component in equine nutrition and management of horses. A total of approximately 130 people attended the three conferences.

Fencing School One school was held in 2016. The 45 attendees learned and experienced hands-on construction of both Permanent Fixed Knot and Hi-Tensile fencing. Participants also experienced the construction and utilization of temporary electric fencing. The course was led by national fencing expert Mr. Lewis Sapp.

Conservation Initiative Grants (CIG) The VFGC completed the third 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, on four farms across the state good grazing management 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 on farms across the state that are owned and/or managed by participants of earlier VFGC Beginning Grazing Schools presented in 2014. Also, as a part of this grant, VFGC put together the Sixth Edition of the Virginia Graziers Planner as an educational and outreach tool. This tool was distributed to 4,500 Graziers across the state providing a monthly checklist of timely activities, conservation, extension, and forage and animal science tips. Photos were also used to showcase forage and grassland production practices each month in Virginia.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) VFGC is a partner with the Chesapeake Bay Foundation with an RCPP grant through USDA. Work being done has provided financial assistance dollars to grassland farmers in the Chesapeake Bay watershed of Virginia, VFGC has facilitated and assisted in grazing system development and implementation on farms in this region. VFGC has begun by hosting in 2016 a 2-day grazing school and one summer forage field day. Plans are to continue a similar effort in 2017 and 2018. VFGC has also begun to recruit a total of 15 farmers to convert at least 600 acres of pasture to improved grazing management. In the first year VFGC has begun to work with six farmers in this effort.

Web Site VFGC continues to maintain a web site at vaforages.org. The website has proven to be beneficial in getting useful information out to forage enthusiasts 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 two five hundred-dollar scholarships in 2016. They were presented to Kelly Mercer and Gabriel Pent who are both students in the Crop and Environmental Science Department at Virginia Tech. Scholarships are 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 C.J. Isabel. VFGC also sponsored C.J. to attend the 2016 AFGC Meeting where he represented Virginia in the Forage Spokesperson Contest. C.J. finished second overall. C.J, also presented how he and his family utilize forages in their diverse livestock and poultry operation at our 2016 Virginia Forage Conferences.

2017 AFGC Annual Meeting VFGC has worked closely with Tina Bowling and the AFGC Board to plan the 2017 AFGC Annual Meeting to be held in Roanoke, Virginia on January 22 thru 25, 2017.