

## 2022 Virginia Forage and Grassland Accomplishment Report

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2022 has once again been a successful year working with and educating forage producers across the state of Virginia. Forage educational and outreach activities have touched over thirty-five hundred forage enthusiasts from Virginia, West Virginia, 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, the National Grazing Lands Coalition, the Virginia Cattle Industry Board, and sponsorship by numerous other organizations from the forage and livestock industry.

**Winter Forage Conferences** “The Green Side of Beef: In Defense of Grassland Agriculture” was the theme for the 2022 VFGC Winter Forage Conferences. It turned out to be both engaging and thought-provoking. With the rise of covid cases around the state and a winter snowstorm attendance totaled 343 at the four venues across the state. VFGC also offered a livestream on the last day of the conference with 112 participants. Our keynote speakers, one an environmental lawyer (Nicolette Hahn Niman) and the other a soil ecologist (Dr. Alan Franzluebbers), represented two different perspectives of agriculture. Both speakers made the case that agricultural production of grazing animals is critical to the long-term function and sustainability of our grassland ecosystems. Jeremy Engh of Lakota Ranch was presented the Outstanding Forage Producer of the Year award.

**Pasture Walks** Five Pasture Walks were held across the state, at producer’s farms. Attendees were educated on numerous things, such as summer annuals, native warm season grass, novel endophyte fescue, silvopasture, soil health, and grass and weed ID. There was a total of 350 attendees at the five pasture walks.

**Fencing School** Three schools were held in 2022. The 45 attendees learned and experienced hands-on construction of both Permanent Fixed Knot and Hi-Tensile fencing. Participants also experienced the setting up and utilization of temporary electric fencing. The course was led by national fencing expert Mr. Lewis Sapp.

**Grazing School** There was one grazing school held in the spring, with 25 participants. The participants learned basic grazing techniques, such as basic forages, grazing arithmetic, and temporary fencing. Over the two days, there was classroom instruction and hands-on field experience.

**Advanced Grazing School** Ranching for Profit was led by Dave Pratt, who is the previous owner of Ranch Management Consultants. There were 45 attendees who participated in the two-day school, with “The Three Secrets for Increasing Profit” and “Hard Work for Harmony” workshops. These workshops taught the participants about how to be more profitable in their operations.

**Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP).** VFGC and the Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) have worked very closely over the past years to promote educational programing that would improve rotational grazing. Improved rotational grazing on pastures reduces erosion and increases absorption making pasture more productive and resilient while protecting water quality. CBF recently completed a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant where VFGC was a sub awardee. Funds were used for educational programing, grazing schools and production of the 2022 VA Grazers’ Planner, there were 3,500 planners distributed across the state.

**Social Media** VFGC has a membership of 329 members. VFGC continues to maintain a web site at [vaforges.org](http://vaforges.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. The VFGC

Facebook account averages 974 monthly viewers. The VFGC YouTube channel has 710 subscribers. Recently, the VFGC created an Instagram account for members to view real-time updates from VFGC 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** VFGC presented a \$1000 scholarship in 2022. The scholarship was presented to Swarup Podder who is a student in the Crop and Soil 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 Jeremy Engh of Lakota Ranch. VFGC also sponsored Jeremy to attend the 2022 AFGC Meeting where he represented Virginia in the Forage Spokesperson Contest. Jeremy presented how he and his family utilize forages in their diverse livestock operation at our 2022 Virginia Forage Conferences.

**Mentor Program** The Virginia Forage and Grassland Council Farmer Mentor Program is a peer-based program that pairs experienced grazers with new or beginner grazers to help teach prescribed grazing practices for better forage production and soil health on mentee farmer’s operations. In the 2022 season, the VFGC Farmer Mentor Program had 9 mentor Farmers who mentored a total of 13 mentee farmers. Activities included one-on-one farm visits, small on-farm group gatherings and demonstrations, online Zoom discussions, attending the Annual VFGC Conference, and calls and emails with Mentors to facilitate inclusive sharing and learning. To further address the need for convenient and accessible platforms for learning, a private Facebook group was created, for program members only, to share information and ask questions. Improved grazing management has already been obtained on over 1,000 grassland acres since the start of this program in 2021.

**Education** Several members of the VFGC’s board of directors met with the VA Department of Education as part of their review of Virginia’s High School Agricultural Science and Careers curriculum. In addition to providing commentary on general agricultural science topics, we were able to put in place additional curriculum requirements and resources to ensure that forage production, grazing management, and grasslands resource conservation are now adequately represented in the guidelines for curriculum taught by career and technical education instructors across the Commonwealth.

**Partnership** We partnered with the National Grazing Lands Coalition to financially support some of our activities and to expand upon what we have done in the past. The NatGLC assistance supported our grazing school for producers, grazing demonstrations, pasture walk outreach events for farmers and technical training on forages and grazing management for agricultural professionals. Some of our technical training was delivered specifically to the Virginia State University Small Farm outreach agents and further connected VFGC to these agents of the historically black college and university in VA. The long-term impacts of this relationship will likely result in many new VFGC members from historically or socially disadvantaged farmers.

The VFGC partners with the Alliance for Grassland Renewal, a group dedicated to the conversion of pastures with toxic endophyte infected tall fescue to novel endophyte tall fescue. In 2022, the Alliance sponsored the VFGC through an in-kind advertising sponsorship of the 2022 Winter Conferences. The Alliance submitted a proposal to the Grazing Lands Coalition Initiative, and the VFGC wrote a letter of support for this proposal.