



Gladwin County, MSU Extension
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September 2021

Dear Great Lakes Grazier,

The summer pasture walks and farm tours have been well attended. I want to send a big thank you out to those that have attended and remind others that there are still several events that will be taking place yet this year.

Join the Michigan Forage Council on Tuesday, September 14, 2021, at 5:00 p.m. at the Gary Carmichael farm located at 13247 60th Ave., Evart MI 49631. The farm is located just west of M-66, north of Evart. Gary and his family will be providing supper and will need a head count prior to the event. We are asking that you would contact Jerry Lindquist, the MI Forage Council Secretary and RSVP. You can reach him by email at: lindquis@msu.edu or call: (231) 912-0103. This event is being sponsored by the Michigan Forage Council but is open to anyone. I would ask that you consider joining the MI Forage Council, the forage and pasture industry could use your support, and it's a great group to belong to! If you are interested, ask Jerry about becoming a member when you register for this event.

The American Scottish Highland Cattle Conference will be held in Kalamazoo/Jackson, MI. October 8 & 9th. Jerry Lindquist and Kable Thurlow will be leading a pasture walk at the event on the 9th and the public is encouraged and invited to attend the entire conference. Visit their website to view all the details <https://www.highlandcattleusa.org>.

I also want to remind everyone about the MSU Extension 2021 Beginning Grazing School that will start on September 21. You spoke and we listened! Last year's attendees stated that a hybrid school would best fit the schedules of those that attend, so this year we will offer a hybrid course. The classroom lectures will be online starting September 21 through October 14 each Tuesday and Thursday evening from 7:00 p.m. – 8:30 p.m. and wrapping up with an in-person event on October 22. For more information, please see the flyer in this newsletter.

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I hope to see you at one of these events.

Kable Thurlow
MSUE Beef & Grazing Educator

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BEGINNING GRAZING SCHOOL 2021

DATE:

Online Classes will be held on Tuesday and Thursday Sept. 21 Thru Oct.14 from 7:00pm-8:30 pm EST. The in-person event will be held on Oct. 22, and will go from 9:00am-4:30pm (Lunch provided)

COST:

\$95.00

HOW TO REGISTER:

<https://events.anr.msu.edu/beginninggrazingschool2021/>

You can register after the classes begin, and will have access to the recorded sessions that you missed. Registration ends on October 15, @ 11:59 pm EST.

CONTACT:

Kable Thurlow
MSUE Beef & Grazing
Educator
989-426-7741
thurlowk@msu.edu



WHO SHOULD ATTEND:

Farmers and landowners who graze dairy, livestock and small ruminant animals, and want the latest animal and forage research on grazing management.

PROGRAM AGENDA:

- September 21: Introduction to school and overview of grazing terms
- September 23: Graziers are Grass Farmers!
- September 28: Soil Health and Fertility
- September 30: Nutrition, Health and Welfare of Grazing Animals
- October 5: Pasture Establishment and Renovations,
- October 7: Fencing & Water
- October 12: Pasture Allocation, Stock Density, Costs
- October 14: Designing a Grazing Plan
- October 22: In-Person Session Covering Various Topics

EXPERTS:

- Kim Cassida, Forage Specialist
- Richard Erhardt, Small Ruminant Specialist
- Kevin Gould, Beef Educator
- Jim Isleib, Field Crops Educator
- Phil Kaatz, Field Crops Educator
- Kable Thurlow, Beef and Grazing Educator
- Frank Wardynski, Ruminant Educator

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The No-Till Organic Challenge

It's generally acknowledged that organic and no-till farming both provide benefits to the environment and in many cases can add to farmers' profit margin. Some might argue that organic and no-till can lead to lower yields, which in some cases can be true, but is often contextual as organic and no-till methods require more precision by the farmer to optimize yield. That said, very few farmers and researchers have identified methods to combine organic and no-till farming at the same time, especially when rotating between annual crops. Let's dive into this conundrum a bit further.

I would argue that there are farmers that can and do easily achieve organic no-till practices consistently. These farmers are those that graze perennial pastures and use only mowing (or shovels) to control weeds and manures for fertilizer. Kudos to those of you that have achieved this status – and perhaps you didn't even realize that you've accomplished something great that's been the target of annual crop farmers and researchers for decades. Perhaps this is something that perennial graziers could use more in their marketing. How does "No-Till Organic Lamb" instead of "Grass-fed" sound for a label on a package? Maybe it needs a bit of wordsmithing or education to go along with, but thanks for going down this thought pathway with me.

Indeed, annual crop producers have long fancied being able to combine both organic and no-till into one system, but only a few have achieved this high target consistently. Given that tillage is a backbone of organic farming, and herbicides are a backbone of no-till farming, rarely do these two methods go hand in hand. Pioneers have developed methods of using cover cropping and relay cropping as one way to bridge the gap between annual crops and control weeds, but it's a tricky business and requires very precise management. One of the most successful methods is to grow a healthy cover crop of cereal rye, sometimes with other species such as hairy vetch, and use a "roller-crimper" to kill and lay down the cover crop which other crops are then planted into. This method requires a thick and vigorous cover crop and precise timing, and cooperation from the crop, weather, and weeds. But rotating between organic crops in this way can be done, and in fact is used by a few fantastic farmers out in the landscape.

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Figure 1. A picture from the tractor cab of the roller-crimper and rye cover that has been terminated.

What becomes a bigger challenge is figuring out how to rotate from a perennial crop to a different crop using organic and no-till. Many of us have been able to “renovate” perennial pastures or hay fields by adding species through intensive grazing followed by frost or inter-seeding, but this method rarely eliminates any of the original species in the field. Is it possible to completely terminate the original perennial crop and establish a new crop without tillage or herbicides? I’ve heard of examples with pure alfalfa stands that involve repeated mowing in conjunction with planting of a vigorous annual crop such as corn or sorghum. It becomes more challenging with multi-species perennial mixtures, especially some of those grasses (think tall fescue, bluegrass or white clover) that can be difficult to kill even with herbicides and tillage. I have some friends that are exploring some options to accomplish this feat over a 1-2 year period with repeated intensive grazing, timely mowing and seeding aggressive annuals, but to be determined whether it works.

I’d love to hear from anyone out there that’s successfully been able to accomplish this rotation from a diverse perennial crop to a new annual or perennial crop using no-till, organic methods. Email me a story if you have one at wilkebro@msu.edu.



Cover Crop Pasture Walk

September 30, 2021

TIME:

6 PM - 8 PM

(light refreshments provided)

LOCATION:

Bluemer Farms

**4753 W. Blanchard Rd.
Blanchard, MI 49310**

REGISTER AT:

**Isabella County MSUE
(989) 317-4079**

**Gladwin County MSUE
(989) 426-7741**

**If you have any
questions, contact:
Paul Gross
(989) 317-4079**

**Kable Thurlow
(989) 426-7741**



Agenda Topics

- **Covers for cash crop fields**
- **Using covers and resting fields**
- **Cover crops for fall grazing**

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Salamanders will no longer be part of the beef supply chain

Dan Buskirk, Michigan State University Extension

More than 650 species of salamanders are distributed throughout the world, with about 150 species native to the U.S. These secretive amphibians are so to themselves, that most people never encounter them. Some remain hidden underground most of their lives and only emerge when critically necessary for their livelihood.

In my Extension work, I have encountered a reluctant and sometimes reclusive breed of beef producer that shares numerous characteristics with the salamander. They are solitary creatures that wish not to be disturbed. Most often, they are not part of any cattle-related groups or networks. The most common variety will duck, dodge, and completely evade involvement with regional, state, or national cattlemen's organizations.

The challenge is this – the environment of the beef supply chain is changing. The flow of product and information that flows with it is becoming more coordinated. This is not a reference to vertical integration like some other animal industries. Retail, food service, and consequently processors, are upping their ideals of information exchange, transparency, as well as product safety and quality. This change in the beef industry has been rather slow in coming, but I believe now will accelerate. As you might imagine, this is not a conducive environment for the salamander-like beef producer. It will likely become a greater struggle for them to compete in the marketplace. They will find it more difficult to keep track of changes that affect markets for their cattle and their livelihood. They will get tripped-up by lapses in communication because their information sources will be either sluggish, unreliable, or both.

I have recently observed several salamander-like beef producers. Some were coaxed out of hiding when they realized that marketing cattle for full value may require Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) certification. Several contacted me after being prompted at a livestock auction. Of course, these were not familiar names or voices on the other end of my phone. They asked me about “the requirement”, and what they needed to do to get certified in this “new program”. I had to bite my lip when I conveyed that the BQA program was launched more than 35 years ago and has by no means been a secret.

My point is this—the industry is rapidly changing. Beef producers will find it increasingly difficult to stay up to date with changing trends, best management practices, technologies, requirements, you name it, unless they are in touch. That is, communicating with their beef producing peers, maintaining a veterinarian client patient relationship (VCPR), networking with allied industry, interacting with their Extension service, and engaging with their state and national cattlemen's associations. If producers become active participants in the beef community, they will automatically shed their salamander-like characteristics of merely lurking. They could become informed, take part, and add tremendous value to the industry.

Just think of the enhanced strength of beef supporting organizations that is conceivable with greater involvement. For example, the recently released 2017 Census of Agriculture reports there are 882,692 cattle operations in the U.S., yet only about 3 in 100 operations are members of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association. What if 1, or 2, or even 3 in 10 helped carry the water? What if state cattlemen's organizations could rely on double or triple their current membership? What would happen

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to industry initiatives, research innovations, lobbying efforts, and product promotion? You get the picture. Everyone in the industry would benefit.

Of course, the irony of this article is that the intended audience will likely not read it first-hand. So, I urge you to be a beef industry advocate and pass this article or message on to someone who needs to become involved. Describe to them the benefits that could be enjoyed with more unity. If everyone reading this convinced just one of their neighbors to join in, what an impact that would have.



Solar Grazing Pasture Walk

DATE

Tuesday, September 21

TIME

6:30 - 8:30 PM

LOCATION

Herbruck's Green
Meadow Organic
Facility
3896 Grand River Ave.
Saranac, MI 48881

NOTE: Follow the signs
for parking.

COST

There is no registration
fee for this event.



WHO SHOULD ATTEND

Sheep producers, local government officials, electricity generators and aggregators, and solar developers.

DESCRIPTION

Individuals who attend this pasture walk will learn how sheep can be utilized for vegetation management under and around ground mounted solar arrays. Attendees will hear from the solar grazer, MSU Extension staff, Herbruck's staff, the solar developer, and environmental consultants involved in the solar project.

HOW TO REGISTER

Visit <https://events.anr.msu.edu/solargrazing/> by September 20th to register.

CONTACT

Charles Gould—616-834-2812 or gouldm@msu.edu

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