

Agricultural Newsletter

UW-Madison College of Ag & Life Science
University of Wisconsin-Extension



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Beginner Beef Pasture Walk to be held at Wabrowetz Farm

Shell Lake - October 12

*Otto Wiegand
Area Agricultural Agent
Burnett, Washburn & Sawyer Counties*

The NW Wisconsin Graziers Network and UW-Extension invite you to a Beginner Beef Pasture Walk at the KALEB Farm west of Shell Lake in Washburn County owned by Kent and Bernadette Wabrowetz on Saturday, Oct. 12, from 10 AM - Noon. This pasture walk is a unique opportunity to see a step-by-step approach to building a hobby-farm beef operation using grazing planning, mentoring, custom-raised cattle, and minimal investment.

The farm contains 80 acres of gently-rolling grassy fields and woods. The Wabrowetz's custom graze a half-dozen stocker Angus steers and heifers for Lynn Johnson of Turtle Lake. The current 12 acres of grazing will be expanded to 24 acres next year. The advantages of custom grazing stockers are to start small, not having to own the animals, not having them in the winter, not having to buy feed, and getting agricultural tax breaks. The Wabrowetz's plan to own beef animals in the future. They have used soil testing, lime and potash to build up the soil. They have added fencing and water lines, and a makeshift cattle-handling facility.

In the past, the Wabrowetz's ran a bulk food store and sold Labrador dogs, Christmas wreaths and fishing worms. Kent worked 28 years for NRCS (Natural Resources Conservation Service) as a civil engineering technician. He served in the Army and National Guard, and did a tour in Iraq in 2004. Bernadette currently works as a dental assistant. Both have Associate Degrees in Conservation Technology and worked in conservation positions in Montana before moving back to Wisconsin.

The address is N3598 County O, up the road from Homestead Crafts. To reach the farm, go west 4 miles from Shell Lake on County B, then turn right or north on County O for ½ mile. Or from Hwy 70 about 6 miles west of Spooner, go south on County O for 4.5 miles. Watch for the signs.

For more information, contact Kent Wabrowetz 715-520-3253, UW-Extension Ag Agents Otto Wiegand or Kevin Schoessow at Spooner 715-635-3506, or Randy Gilbertson 715-520-2112 at NW Graziers.

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and
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Beginning Farmer Course Starts Soon

To be held at the Government Center in Siren

Otto Wiegand
Area Agricultural Agent
Burnett, Washburn & Sawyer Counties

The Wisconsin School for Beginning Dairy and Livestock Farmers course will be offered locally this fall and winter at the Government Center in Siren beginning Nov. 7. The course comes through the University of Wisconsin Farm and Industry Short Course and is co-hosted by UW-Extension and the NW Graziers Network.

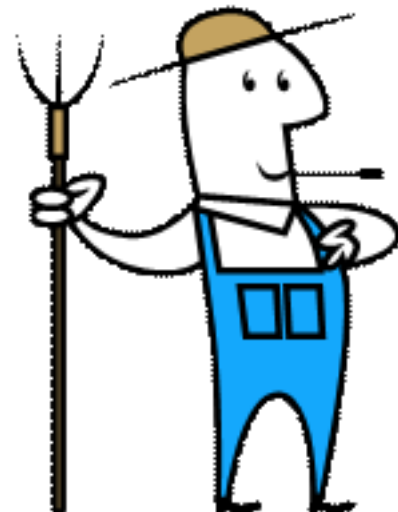
Delivery will be done through interactive video and audio. Most of the subject materials apply to both grass-based and conventional farming and cover dairy, beef, sheep and goats. An important aspect of the course is business planning. If desired, participants will be able to develop their own business plans by the end of the course. Since the course began in 1995, over 500 students have enrolled statewide and a third have gone on to start their own farms.

There are 14 regular class sessions starting Nov. 7. The course is divided into three terms. Classes run from 11:00 AM to 1:30 PM on Thursdays except for one class on the Tuesday before Thanksgiving. Participants who miss a class may catch it later on-line. The entire course may also be taken on line. Participants may opt to take individual class sessions. The cost of the entire course will be \$240 or \$15 per session. Sometimes scholarships are available.

Subjects may vary, but usually include starting a livestock business, whether confinement or grazing, grazing system layout, stray voltage, goal-setting, feeding on pasture, production and marketing of pasture-based beef, goat and sheep dairying, information on beginner loans, enterprise budgets, farm-driven marketing, business plan writing, successful models for business startups, bio-fuels and farm energy, organic farming, low-cost parlors, out-wintering and environmental stewardship.

A brochure for the course will be available. Also watch for press releases in the papers. Additional afternoon topics of interest may be added by local UW-Extension if requested. Bring your own lunch.

Please register by Nov. 4th if you plan to attend the entire course. To register or obtain further information, contact Otto Wiegand or Kevin Schoessow at UWEX Spoooner at 715-635-3506, or Dick Cates in Madison, 608-265-6437. The course is a collaborative effort between the UW-Center for Integrated Agricultural Studies, UW Cooperative Extension, CALS, DATCP, the Technical Colleges and GrassWorks.



Ergot Fungus Becoming More Prevalent in NW Wisconsin

*Otto Wiegand
Area Agricultural Agent
Burnett, Washburn & Sawyer Counties*

Farmers in northwest Wisconsin have been seeing more ergot fungus on grass seed heads this year than in previous years, especially on pasture grasses. The fungus appears to be most often found on brome grass and orchardgrass, but also on timothy, quack and canarygrass. The long, cold spring and sudden hot, dry weather conditions may have provoked more ergot this year. Hay harvested before heading out is not a problem. But due to wet weather conditions in June, farmers were more likely to delay harvesting hay until grasses were headed out.

Ergot is a fungal disease that is common in the northern two-thirds of North America. It affects wild and cultivated grasses, as well as small grain crops such as wheat, oats, barley and especially rye. The ergot pathogen produces alkaloid toxins that, if ingested, can result in convulsions, hallucinations, gangrene, and death. Interestingly, some ergot toxins, when used at low dosages, have pharmaceutical applications such as inducing labor and treating migraine headaches. Ergot has been suggested as a causative factor in the behavior leading up to the Salem witch trials.

Ergot sclerotia form on seed heads and look like pencil lead, other seeds or rodent droppings. Ergot in small grains may be sorted out in the

milling process, but on pasture or hay presents a potential feed danger to livestock including cattle, sheep, goats and horses. There is no treatment for the plant once the fungus appears. Ergot is found in nature and there is some present every year.

Maximum tolerances by animals can be as low as half of a percent of sclerotia by weight. Ergot is a vasoconstrictor causing restricted blood flow, especially to the extremities. Affected animals may develop lameness in the back legs first, with foot rot and other infections. No reports have yet been received by Extension in Spooner on animal health problems due to ergot. The risk level to livestock at this point is not clear, because many animals are still on green pastures and would not be interested in eating mature headed-out grasses. Once pastures dry up or fall begins and hay becomes the principal feed source, then problems may occur.

There is no need to panic at this point, but check your hay bales for any ergot in the heads. Be vigilant when buying or selling hay. It is probable that animals that are not overly hungry will sort the hay and ignore the heads. Handling of hay and feeding may also shake off the sclerotia. Be sure to clean feeders before adding more new hay. Remove suspect hay or dilute with other feeds. Serious ergot areas in the field should be mowed and not used for hay or bedding. If feasible, it is better to plow the area under and rotate to corn, soybeans or alfalfa. Mow surrounding grassy areas to prevent ergot from spreading into the field. Ergot-resistant varieties are not available. Fungicides applied next year may prevent ergot from forming,

but are generally not very effective. The best thing is to make hay before grasses are headed out.

If you see any suspicious signs of ergot toxicity, remove the hay source from the animals and call your veterinarian.

NRCS Offers Practices and Funds for Farm, Forestry and Wildlife Lands

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has announced that the 2014 Wisconsin signup for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is currently taking place. The application deadline for this signup will be November 21st, 2013. New this year is that practices will be ranked high, medium or low depending upon if they need federal, state or county permits. The EQIP program is the primary program available to farmers for farmland conservation work, offering flat rate payments for various conservation practices.

Common practices signed up for in the past include Diversions, Fence, Grassed Waterway, Pasture/Rangeland Planting, Well Abandonment, Nutrient Management, Prescribed Grazing and Forest Activity Plans. The Forest Activity Plans once established open the door for participating in EQIP performing woodland practices such as Tree and Shrub Planting, Forest Stand Improvement and Forest Trail and Landings.

A number of conservation practices require county, state or federal permits. Obtaining the proper

permit(s) is the landowner's responsibility, and may sometimes be a lengthy process. NRCS will continue to provide technical assistance to landowners to help them fulfill their permitting responsibilities, but can only do so as time and staff resources will allow. Permits are commonly required for manure storage structures, erosion control structures, streambank and wetland restorations, and some other practices.

Applications for practices requiring permits will receive high priority ranking if the applicant has already obtained all necessary permits. Applications will receive medium priority if the applicant has completed all paperwork for the permit(s). And, applications will receive low priority if the applicant has not begun the permit process. Applications receiving a low priority will only be ranked for funding if funds remain once higher priority and medium priority applications are obligated.

It is recommended that farmers come in early and get started planning potential projects. NRCS can help provide information on which permits are needed for particular practices. Then, farmers will be able to contact the permitting agency earlier. Technical assistance is available from NRCS, county, state agencies, some non-profit groups, and private consultants to do the design work needed to get some state or local permits.

For more information on the EQIP program contact your local NRCS office in Spooner or Ladysmith.

Forging a Partnership with a Custom Harvester

*Adapted from Matthew Digman
USDA Forage Research
Madison, Wisconsin*

For example, Family X dairy chooses not to utilize the services of a custom harvester; however, Family Y has been working with a custom harvester for the last eight years. Which one is right? I'd argue both, given their specific situations. Family X added the cropping enterprise to integrate the brother into the farm; consequently, complete the harvesting themselves. Family Y, on the other hand, does not yet have the next generation working on the farm and, therefore, does not have the manpower to attend to both the dairying and the harvesting. Also, Family X has chosen to modernize their equipment fleet, whereas Family Y has focused on expanding their dairy facilities. Each farm has chosen to focus on the core interests and expertise of their workforce.

So what's the outlook on your dairy? Are you more of a cow person or an equipment person? What are your interests? These are just a few of the many questions that a producer needs to ask before building a partnership with a custom harvester. I say partnership because when you contract with a custom harvester, you entrust one of the profit-making enterprises of your dairy to the custom harvester. You are right to think that this could be risky if your custom harvester is not reliable. But if a good partnership is formed, the custom harvester can leverage their high-capacity equipment to harvest forage

faster and at higher quality and uniformity, all without interrupting the daily activities necessary to maintain the profitability of your milking, calf, and/or heifer operations. This relationship could ultimately result in lower forage cost, more consistent work schedule for farm employees, and more timely response to the needs of the animals.

How can a custom harvester harvest forage at lower cost than I do right now? Your first step should be to understand your harvesting costs. One way to assess this is to complete a partial budget analysis. The University of Wisconsin Extension and others provide worksheets to help with this task. This is an important step and will help you better understand the equipment and timeliness costs of your operation. However, it's difficult to include all costs or benefits, such as the silage uniformity resulting from filling your bunker in a couple of days versus a couple of weeks, postponing response to your animals' needs during the harvest season, or missing your son or daughter's baseball game, to name a few examples.

So what is timeliness cost? Timeliness cost is the loss in crop value as the optimal harvest window is missed. For example, with alfalfa, this can be harvesting at the wrong stage of maturity or not being able to harvest hay lying in the field before it is too dry; both cases result in lower quality silage. Producers with larger, high-capacity equipment have a better chance of putting up more tons of optimally harvested material than a producer with smaller equipment. Unfortunately, the larger equipment has a higher investment cost. This is where the specialized capabilities of a

custom harvester pay off. The custom harvester doesn't determine the capacity of equipment based on the needs of your farm alone but on all of the farms they service. Thus, the equipment capacity and, therefore, timeliness of harvest is much different than that which the dairy could justify on their own. For instance, if an 80-cow dairy wanted to increase the capacity of their equipment, they'd have to absorb the higher production costs or add extra harvested acres (e.g. harvesting neighbor's forage) to lower the added investment cost. Although these scenarios are possible, especially if a family member or partner wants to take on this role, it is hard to compete with the number of acres that a well-established custom harvester can spread their costs over.

All this is well and good, but what if a custom harvester is not available at the optimal time of harvest? Simply put, you need to find one who can work on your schedule. The truth is that this arrangement is a partnership. Let's consider our alfalfa example. In alfalfa, some of the custom harvester's clients may focus on quality while others may wait for higher tonnage. It is important that you, as the producer, communicate your needs with the operator and that he or she integrates this information along with your harvested acres so clients can be properly scheduled. Remember, they might not start when you would have, but with proper management on their end, they'll finish before you would have. This brings up my final point: the success of this partnership is communication. Communicating your acreage and crop maturity expectations will ensure a satisfactory partnership with your custom harvester. This will help them schedule your harvest along with their other

Northwest Area Wisconsin Land & Water Conservation Association Tour

When: Friday, October 18; 9:00am-3:00pm

Where: Burnett County, meet at Crex Meadows Wildlife Area visitor center

What: We will board a bus and tour Crex Meadows; enjoy a catered lunch at the visitor center; continue in the bus and tour a Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO); and end at Burnett Dairy for a tour and shopping.

Fee: \$25 (covers bus and lunch costs)

How: You must let me know if you want to join us by Monday, October 7th; contact christine.ostern@douglascounwywi.org or **218-591-0586**.

clients. These conversations must take place early in the year, not two days before you want your first cutting started. It is critical that the custom harvester has a clear picture of the expectations from all of their clients well before the first tire hits the field.

Continuing with the same operator over a number of years is also critical to the partnership. This will allow the operator to become familiar with your farm's fields, haul distances, and feed storage site. This will ensure timely harvest for you, allowing the operator to more accurately schedule clients. Hiring the lowest bidder will save you in the short run but could result in untimely harvest as they integrate you into their schedule. It will take time for you to build a working relationship with any new partner, and switching operators frequently can be risky.

When interviewing a custom harvester, ask about their other clients. How long have they worked with each of them? How many new clients do they expect to take on? This will give you an idea of customer loyalty and their ability to fit you into their schedule. Also, ask for references. Talk to their clients; ask them questions about their

expectations and the dynamic of their relationship.

Visit the custom harvester's shop. Look over their equipment. Is it well maintained? What is their maintenance program? Who are their employees? Are they seasonal or do they maintain them throughout the year? What is their training program? Expect the operator to interview you as well. Remember this is a partnership and businesses don't partner without all of the facts. Don't be surprised if they, too, ask for references or even a letter of credit from your bank. This protects not only their interests but also their other clients' interests and the sustainability of their business.

All of this discussion is moot if harvesting forages is what keeps you excited about farming. That's ok. High quality forage is the raw material for milk production, and I'd argue it is just as important as some of the other cow needs. But if you're feeling overwhelmed or are unsure about labor, a partnership with a custom harvester could increase the profitability of your dairy and dramatically decrease your stress level. Take the time to do a cost-benefit analysis and see if a custom harvester fits your needs.

Washburn County Land and Water Department Services

Lisa Burns
Conservation Coordinator
Washburn County Land and Water

The Washburn County Land and Water Department provides competent and professional services in the planning, design and implementation of programs and projects that help protect, restore and sustain the soil and water resources. The department helps landowners comply with various county ordinances and Ag and non-Ag related practices.

The department pays up to 70% of costs and the landowner pays 30%. However, individual labor can help offset those costs. All practices must meet state and federal requirements in order to receive funding. There are numerous practices that can be covered, and a few are listed below:

- Nutrient Management Planning
- Farmland Preservation
- Animal Waste Storage Systems/Closures
- Access Road or Cattle Crossing
- Livestock Fencing
- Livestock Watering Facilities
- Well Abandonment
- Implementation of the Water Quality Performance Standards found in NR151
- Shoreline Restoration and Protection

For a complete list of available practices, visit the link "Cost Share Practices" on the Land and Water Conservation website: <http://www.co.washburn.wi.us/departments/landwatercons/> or call the office at 715-468-4654 for more information.

The Department has the following equipment for rent (see photos below):

***No-Till Seeder (7 foot)**

Rate - \$10.00/acre - \$50.00 minimum

Towing requirements - draw pin hitch

Tractor requirements - single spool hydraulics with minimum 50 HP

Reservation Necessary

***Tree Planter**

Rate - \$10.00/1000 trees - \$25.00 minimum

Towing requirements - 2 5/16" ball (we will provide)

Tractor requirements - single spool hydraulics with minimum 40 HP

Reservation Necessary

Wisconsin Statutes (Chapter 92.10) requires each county Land and Water Department to prepare a Land and Water Resource Management (LWRM) plan as a condition of state grants through the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP). The plan helps guide the department and other agencies manage land and provide natural resources education in their efforts to protect water resources. Goals established provide the basis for funding from various private, local, state and federal sources. A copy can of the plan can be picked up at the office or can be seen on the department website.

For more specifics on what your county offers, contact your local Land and Water Conservation Department.



No-Till Seeder



Tree Planter

Cover Crops -- Are They in Your Future?

*Kevin Schoessow
Area Agricultural Development Agent
Burnett, Sawyer & Washburn Counties*

There has been an increased interest in cover cropping and the benefits of cover crops in recent years. This interest is due in part to farmers looking for ways to increase forage production or as an alternative cropping option. Agronomists and farmers are promoting cover crops as a way to increase biodiversity within a cropping system and improve soil health.

Cover crops, like other tools farmers have at their disposal, require a certain amount of knowledge, experience and sometimes luck to be an effective and profitable venture.

Trade magazines, seed companies and equipment manufacturers have all increased their efforts to promote cover cropping. State and Federal agencies have also teamed up to provide program support and cost-share funding for cover crops. Universities are becoming more active in partnering with farmers and agencies to setup research trials and provide non biased information on the benefits of cover cropping.

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has a national soil health initiative with resources and recommendations for improving soil quality and soil health, including cover crops. UW-Extension has several factsheets, case studies and YouTube videos on cover crops, and has partnered with NRCS to provide training on healthy soils. The UW-Extension grain crops team has also used the 'Cover Crops Garden' that has been a very popular outdoor classroom at the past two Farm Technology Days.

So Why Plant Covers Crops?

Cover crops can be an integral part of a cropping system. Cover crops develop an environment that sustains and nourishes plants, soil microbes and beneficial insects.

Cover crops are typically planted in late summer or fall around harvest and before spring planting of the following year's crops. Examples of cover crops include rye, wheat, oats, clovers and other legumes, turnips, radishes, and triticale. Planting several cover crop species together in a mixture can increase their impact on soil health. Each cover crop provides its own set of benefits, so it's important to choose the right cover crop mixture to meet management goals.

(Continued on back page)

This Quarter's Events

Contacts: UW-Extension Ag Agents Otto Wiegand or Kevin Schoessow, Spooner Station, 715-635-3506/800-528-1914, Jane Anklam Douglas Co, 715-395-1363, or Jason Fischbach, Ashland & Bayfield Counties, 715-373-6104 x5 for more information.

Oct 1-5, Tues-Sat – World Dairy Expo, Madison

Oct 12, Sat, 10-Noon – Beginner Beef Pasture Walk, Shell Lake – KALEBs Farm, Kent and Bernadette Wabrowetz (See article)

Oct 18, Fri, 9-3 – NW Wisconsin Land & Water Conservation Bus Tour, Burnett Co – \$25, contact Christine Ostern, 218-591-0586 (See article)

Nov 7–Mar – Beginning Farmer Course, Government Center, Siren - 14 sessions, 2-3 hours per session, \$240 for full course or \$15 per session, now in its 7th consecutive year in this region, contact Otto Wiegand, 715-635-3506 (See article)

Nov 7-9, Thurs-Sat – Dairy Sheep Symposium, Cambridge, Ontario, Canada – Go to www.dsana.org/ or call 519-836-0043

Nov 14, Thurs - Dairy Repro Program, Eau Claire – contact Mark Hagedorn, 715-839-4714

Nov 21, Thurs – NRCS EQIP Program Deadline – contact Tom Fredrickson in Spooner 715-635-8228, Mike Koehler in Ladysmith 715-532-3786, or your local NRCS office now (See article)

Dec 3, Tues – Dairy Heifer Workshop, Baldwin (AM) and Eau Claire (PM) – contact Ryan Sterry for Baldwin, 715-531-1930, or Mark Hagedorn for Eau Claire, 715-839-4714

Dec 19, Thurs - The Business of Farm Succession: How do we plan for the transfer of our operation or assets?, Superior - This session will be held in a workshop/discussion fashion for family farms and corporations to address this very important, sometimes hard to handle business and life decision. Registration details will be coming soon. Contact Jane Anklam, UW-Extension , Douglas County, jane.anklam@ces.uwex.edu, 715-395-1515

Jan 16-18, Thurs-Sat – GrassWorks Conference, Rothschild / Wausau – Patriot Center, contact Lanice Szomi, 715-965-8324

Restoring Soil Health – Cover crops help increase organic matter in the soil and improve overall soil health by adding living roots to the soil during more months of the year. Cover crops can improve water infiltration into the soil. Deep-rooted crops like forage radishes create natural water passages. Legume cover crops serve as natural fertilizers while grasses scavenge nutrients that are often lost after harvest or during winter.

Natural Resource Protection – Along with crop residue above ground, cover crops protect the soil against erosive heavy rains and strong winds. Cover crops trap excess nitrogen, keeping it from leaching into groundwater or running off into surface water – releasing it later to feed growing crops.

Livestock Feed – Cover crops can provide livestock producers with additional grazing or haying opportunities.

Wildlife Habitat – Cover crops provide winter food and cover for birds and other wildlife. During the growing season, they can provide food for pollinators.

Cover Crops as part of a Soil Health Management Systems

Implementing Soil Health Management Systems can lead to increased organic matter, more soil organisms, reduced soil compaction and improved nutrient storage and cycling. As an added bonus, fully functioning, healthy soils absorb and retain more water, making them less susceptible to runoff and erosion. This means more water will be available for crops when they need it. Soil Health Management Systems allow farmers to enjoy profits because they spend less on fuel and energy while benefiting from the higher crop yields resulting from improved soil conditions.

Contact your local NRCS office to learn more about Soil Health Management Systems and the technical and financial assistance available to help “Unlock the Secrets in the Soil.”



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**Kevin Schoessow
UWEX Area Agricultural Agent**