

Grazing Workshop Changes Lives

David Eaheart

Jim and Peggy Twesten's lives changed when they attended two Management Intensive Grazing workshops. After attending their second workshop, they decided to quit their jobs, sell their farm, and buy and move to a 1,000-acre grass farm in north Missouri.

In 1990, the Twestens attended the first Management Intensive Grazing workshop held at the University of Missouri Forage Systems Research Center in Linneus, Missouri. Jim, a former body shop manager, and Peggy, a former learning disability assistant school teacher, owned a small grass farm and grazed steers near Hillsboro, Missouri.

The Twestens wanted to get the maximum use out of their grass. So, they attended the workshop to learn about grass farming and went again the second year to learn more.

"We were excited after attending the schools," says Jim.

After attending the second workshop they made the decision to become full-time grass farmers. "We found the best grass farm in northern Missouri and decided on it because we were familiar with Missouri forages," says Jim. They based their decision on the knowledge they learned at the workshops. The Twestens are just one of hundreds of people whose lives have been changed by the grazing workshops.

The Management Intensive Grazing workshops teach in-depth grazing management and construction of planned grazing systems. The three-day workshops held at the University of Missouri Forage Systems Research Center bring a wealth of knowledge to participants through classroom and field experience.

"Our primary purpose is to educate producers and agency people in the fundamental understanding

of grassland management," says Jim Gerrish, research assistant professor at the University of Missouri Forage Systems Research Center and workshop instructor.

At the workshops students spend part of their time in the classroom and part of their time in the field. About 30 students are in the classroom while another 30 students are in the field.



In the classroom students learn about basic grazing terminology, evaluation of resources, managing the soil resource, meeting nutritional needs of livestock on pasture, matching animal type to pasture systems, supplementation of cattle grazing high quality forages, water systems, and development of grazing systems. Out in the field, plant growth and forage quality, pasture assessment, stockpiling and winter grazing, and fencing layout and design are covered.

Students also develop a planned grazing system. The participants are divided into working groups and asked to develop a grazing plan

for an actual farm situation. This year the workshops went to the Twesten's farm to do this exercise on a field. The classroom and field lectures, and the grazing plan help the participants take the information they learned and apply it on their farms.

Gerrish says instructors focus on the entire plant, animal and soil complex. Instructors come with varied backgrounds from the University of Missouri and the Soil Conservation Service. Grassland specialists, animal scientists, agricultural economists, forage specialists and producers teach at the workshop.

"It's a group of effective educators that get the points across. Their credibility is high," says Ron Morrow, University of Missouri animal scientist and workshop instructor.

Students use textbooks in the classroom. The textbooks are *Intensive Grazing Management: Forage, Animals, Men, Profits* by Burt Smith and *Forage-Animal Management Systems* by Roy Blaser, along with a loose-leaf binder of materials on grazing management specific to the Midwest.

Participants at the workshop are as diverse as the subject matter covered. They vary from producers with several thousand acres to part-time farmers with 20 acres.

Several public agencies also send employees to the workshop for training. The Soil Conservation Service, Missouri Department of Conservation, Department of Natural Resources from several states, and University Extension have sent people to the workshop. Participants have come from 22 states.

"It's a way to educate the educator," says Morrow. SCS people use the information they learn when



helping producers with farm plans and other conservation practices. Maurice Davis, SCS range conservationist and workshop instructor, says the students have a high commitment to learning about intensive grazing management. They're willing to pay the cost and be gone from their farms for three days. The workshop costs \$90 a person.

"The producers add a lot to the workshop because they share the experiences they've had," says Davis.

Gerrish agrees with Davis. The mix of agency people and producers makes it a successful workshop.

"That's the beauty of our workshop. Everyone can interact and we all learn from each other," says Gerrish.

This interaction allows the workshops to take the direction the participants want. Out in the field much of the discussion is lead by questions from the students.

Producers bring a perspective the agency representatives might not be aware of and the agency people bring a side of the issue producers might not know, says Gerrish.

Morrow and Gerris developed the workshop after giving several one-

nighter presentations on intensive grazing.

"It's too complex of a subject and we can't cover it in a one-night meeting," says Gerrish. "We were getting frustrated in the information system we were using. It was just enough information for producers to get in trouble because the exceptions were not covered."



So the two came up with the idea of a three-day workshop.

The workshops started in 1990 with the intention of two workshops and 30 people at each workshop. The demand far exceeded expectations so they added one more workshop date and opened each workshop to 60 people.

"There was a demand for it and we were turning people away," says Gerrish.

Much of that demand comes from repeat students. Some students come every year, says Davis.

Currently, the instructors are developing a one-day refresher course for past participants. It will cover advanced information and new developments in intensive grazing research since past workshops.

The workshop was the first one organized in the country in cooperation between a land grant university and the Soil Conservation Service. The workshop was held in May and August 1993. Another workshop will be held in October.

For more information about the Management Intensive Grazing Workshop contact the Forage Systems



Research Center, Route 1, Box 80, Linneus, MO 64653.

Not everyone's lives will change as drastically as the Twestens did after attending the workshops. But the workshops do impact the way participants think about and use grazing on their farm.

Not a day passes on the Twestens' they don't do something that was directly influenced by the workshop. They split a 160-acre field into six paddocks for rotational grazing this year. They developed the plan from the information they learned at the workshop.

"I'm a grass farmer and some people wouldn't like to admit that. They would rather be called cowboys, but I make my living from grass," says Jim Twesten. "And what I learned at the schools helps me do this."

North Dakota's CRP Grazing and Haying Demonstration Project

Jeffrey L. Printz

With the passage of the 1985 farm bill, a program reminiscent of the Soil Bank program of the 1950s and '60s was born. The Conservation Reserve Program, or CRP, is similar to the Soil Bank program of the '50s and '60s in that CRP removes land from annual crop production and places it in permanent cover. Although similar to the Soil Bank program in this respect, the expressed goals of CRP were clear-cut and the qualification process for entering cropland into the program was very different.

In North Dakota, almost 3 million acres have been enrolled in CRP. Most regard the impacts of this program on the soil and wildlife resources as positive. In North Dakota, CRP has resulted in the saving of about 45 million tons of soil per year, taken over 1 million acres of wheat base out of production, provided income support for over 13,000 farmers, and created some of the highest wildlife populations since the Soil Bank days (Senechal 1990).

Others view the impacts of CRP on the small local communities as negative.

It has been 8 years since the first CRP bids were accepted and the first contracts written. In the fall of 1995, the first contracts will expire. What will be the future of these CRP acres? Will most be returned to annual crop production as happened when the Soil Bank contracts expired? Or will the contract holders find alternative methods of earning income from this land which will keep these acres in permanent cover?

Many factors will influence the contract holder's decisions on post CRP land use. Certainly one of the more overriding factors will be the provisions of the 1995 Farm Bill. Other factors, such as the age of the contract holder, the presence of livestock on the farm and the condition of the grass stand on the CRP fields will have an influence on this decision.

Without a doubt, the largest influence will be economic. The need to have some type of economic return from

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