



APRIL 2009

Pasture News

LAGRANGE COUNTY SOIL & WATER
CONSERVATION DISTRICT
PHONE (260)463-3471 EXT. 3
WWW.LAGRANGESWCD.ORG

“CALF RAISING”

HOST: Lavern Bontrager

0365 W 200 N

LaGrange, IN 46761

April 14th, 2009

1:00p.m.

Management Intensive Grazing in Indiana

The technical staff of the LaGrange County Soil & Water Conservation District works with producers on soil and water related management issues all on a voluntary basis. Clean Water Indiana grant funds were received to conduct a nutrient management workshop, which was completed last fall, and then to do some follow-up. The first spring Pasture Walk, scheduled for Tuesday, April 14, 2009 at the Lavern Bontrager Family Farm on county road 200 N, the discussion will focus on “manure management planning” and “calf raising”, providing follow-up to the fall workshop. Copies of a Purdue Extension publication, compiled in partnership with USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service, will be handed out at the pasture walk.

The publication, entitled “Management Intensive Grazing in Indiana”, provides information on improving pasture, physical components of a grazing system, grazing management considerations and Indiana graziers’ experiences. If you are not able to attend the April pasture walk, own property in LaGrange County, and are interested in receiving a copy of this publication, contact one of the technical staff members – Martin Franke or Dave Hague. They will schedule a time to come to your farm and discuss nutrient management and provide a copy of the publication. There are a limited number of publications available, so they will be distributed on a first come first serve basis. Call 260-463-3471 ext 3 for more information.



If you need transportation to the Pasture Walk please contact the office.

If you know someone who would like to receive a copy of the Pasture News mailing, or would prefer to receive an electronic copy, please contact the office (260)463-3471 ext.3,
jennie.holcomb@in.nacdn.net

Livestock Ordinance

LaGrange County, Indiana, is a rectangle of land measuring approximately 24 miles long (east to west) by 16 miles high (north to south). It contains 384 square miles of territory, 7 square miles of which is occupied by the many natural glacial lakes which dot its surface. With 640 acres to the square mile, this means that there are 245,760 acres in LaGrange County. In 1840, the first census taken in the county showed a population of 3664 persons. By 1900, this number had grown to 15,284; by 2008, the latest statistic shows a population of 37,172. At the current rate of growth, 2025 should show see around 44,344 people living here. The rural charm that has brought many to live in our beautiful northeastern Indiana county is still here, but as one can easily see, the county is growing steadily more crowded.

As the human population has grown, so has the population of domesticated livestock. For several of the last 10 years, for example, LaGrange County was listed as the leading county in Indiana, and indeed one of such in the whole United States, for duck production. The county is also a leading producer of chickens, both for meat and eggs, cattle (both dairy and beef), horses (used extensively by the county's large Amish population), hogs, sheep and goats. While this agricultural production is good for the local economy, it provides a challenge environmentally.

To address this resource concern, the LaGrange County Plan Commission passed an amendment to the County's Zoning Ordinance back in 2006 that affects everyone wishing to build a new livestock facility or substantially alter an existing one. The county has required new or expanded livestock farms to develop manure management plans for several years. This new ordinance more clearly defines the steps that will need to be taken for livestock producers to remain in compliance with the law regarding manure storage, land application and management.

When producers wishing to build new facilities or expand existing ones apply for building permits with the county Building Department, they will be given a checklist of required steps and information they will need to follow and provide in order to begin the process of developing an MMP. MMP's (manure management plans) will be developed and reviewed in cooperation with the LaGrange County Soil and Water Conservation District. Besides the usual personal and technical information that is required for the issuance of all building permits, additional information required for livestock producers now includes numbers, average size and species of livestock involved, amount of available spreading acreage including soil tests taken within the last three years, and plans for manure storage facilities.

Most of the aforementioned information must be provided before a building permit will be issued. A completed MMP is required before the producer will be allowed to house livestock in his new or altered buildings or facilities.

Manure management plans are required in many parts of our country today to help livestock farmers succeed in managing their operations, while at the same time protecting the environment for everyone. In today's world of unstable fuel and fertilizer costs, manure is an increasingly valuable crop production resource.

Please be aware that this revised ordinance will make planning ahead extremely important on the part of the livestock producer wishing to expand his operation or start a new one. For more information concerning this process, please contact the LaGrange County Building Department at 499-6304 or the LaGrange County Soil and Water Conservation District at 463-3471 extension 3.

“Managing the forages to the soils on which they are grown helps ensure successful grazing.”

Upcoming Walks

May 12—Ray Eash

September 8—Open

June 9—Vernon Hochstetler

October 13—John Belork

July 14—Earnest Stutzman

November 10—Open

August 11—Bob Eash

2009 Northern Indiana Grazing Conference Largest Ever!

On Friday, February 6, the Antique Auction Barn at Shipshewana hosted the largest yet Northern Indiana Grazing Conference. This event was the seventh annual conference, the first having been held at the LaGrange County 4-H Community Building back in 2002 with 224 in attendance. As the conference has always been held in late winter, weather conditions have not always been kind; for instance, the 2005 event was plagued with very dense fog, while last year's conference saw 8" of fresh snow fall the night before. The 2007 conference had been the largest to date with around 625 participants, but 2009 swept away all previous records with over 800 people (including 150 walk-ins) in attendance by lunch time. The Brookside Amish School was able to provide a delicious lunch for 807 people in 24 minutes, including all of the additional walk-ins. No one went away hungry!

The Northern Indiana Grazing Conference is dedicated to promoting and helping spread information concerning management intensive rotational grazing. This is a system of low overhead, high management livestock raising adaptable to any species that consumes forages-grasses, legumes and forbs-including dairy and beef cattle, horses, goats, sheep, poultry and "exotics" such as bison, llamas and alpacas. The emphasis of the conference has always been focused on maintaining the small family farm. This year there was a significant increase in attendance by young families.

Despite crowded conditions,

this year's program was well received by the crowd. A wide variety of speakers, both local and from abroad, dealt with subjects like organic calf raising, dairy production on a rotational grazing farm, marketing goat milk and meat, and managing pastured poultry. Attendance at the evening session, which included a Youth Panel discussion and an address by David Kline of Ohio on "Sustaining the Family Farm", also broke all previous records. By the end of the day, including the evening program, nearly 1000 different individuals had attended some part of the 2009 NIGC. Those attendees were made up of Amish and English, including individuals from eight states and South America, both male and female farm owners and operators.

The record breaking attendance can be attributed to a couple of different things, one being the ideal weather. It was a beautiful sunny day! Another reason is tied to the economic downturn in the area. There have been and continue to be massive lay offs in the RV and modular home industry in northern Indiana, with LaGrange and Elkhart Counties experiencing the highest unemployment rates in the state. Many people who are not currently working were able to attend the grazing conference this year. They were made up of small landowners looking for alternatives to factory income on their small farms.

Throughout the day, participants were able to spend time attending learning sessions, and in between, networking with others and interacting with

those same speakers. Participants were also able to visit with 50 vendors providing the newest grazing and farming related innovations and products at the conference commercial exhibition.

The conference is planned and carried out annually by a local committee of graziers from LaGrange, Elkhart, Steuben, Marshall and Noble Counties, in cooperation with the LaGrange County Soil and Water Conservation District, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service. The program is also heavily supported by local, regional, national and international agriculturally-related businesses. Next year's conference is scheduled for Friday, February 5, 2010. For more information concerning the NIGC, please contact the LaGrange County SWCD at 260-463-3471 ext. 3.

"The grazier's goal is to minimize the amount of grain that is fed to their livestock and to maximize the amount of forage their livestock eat."



Cover Crops

Using cover crops in farming systems is not a new practice. Prior to the development of manufactured fertilizers, cover crops were commonly used to improve soil structure and productivity. Recent economical and environmental concerns have fueled an increase in cover crop use. Cover crops improve soil quality, add organic matter to the soil and reduce compaction. After the fall harvest there is little crop residue and no matter what the soil type, machinery and rain can pack the soil making the surface hard and impermeable. Much of the surface applied manure will be carried away by the next rain.

Cover crops can enhance nitrogen production and/or reduce leaching. Grass (annual ryegrass, cereal rye, wheat, oilseed radish) can be used to take up excess nitrogen and reduce the potential for groundwater leaching. Cover crops can be used to reduce wind and water erosion. Maintaining ground cover through fall, winter and early spring drastically reduces soil loss.

Roots of the cover crop make the soil surface more permeable so water and manure pollutants are less likely to move over the surface. The top growth reduces run-off. The nitrogen is harnessed in the roots and green tissue ready to be released in the spring when the cover crop is killed off. Even if only 40 pounds per acre of nitrogen are retained, spring fertilizer costs can be reduced by \$30 per acre. There is also a savings increase when phosphorus and potassium values are included. Cover crops can also play a role in suppressing weed growth, as long as they are managed properly.

The cover crop must be killed in the spring, not harvested, for the nutrients to be saved for the new crops. Cover crop seedings do not have to be perfect. The goal is not yield per acre but nutrient recovery and environmental protection per acre.

