



THE PASTURE PROJECT

ABOUT US

The Pasture Project works to advance and integrate regenerative grazing as a scalable, market-driven solution for building healthy soil, viable farms, and resilient communities in the Upper Midwest.

An initiative of the Wallace Center at Winrock International, we work with farmers, land managers, public agencies, and farm organizations to build resources, provide technical assistance, and remove barriers for expanding the use of regenerative practices that yield win-win outcomes for farmers, communities, and the environment.

ONGOING PROGRAMS

Grazing Cover Crops

The use of cover crops can be a stepping stone for farmers towards more comprehensive use of regenerative practices that support soil health and water quality. We work with regional partners to conduct on-farm research on grazing cover crops with a cohort of collaborating farms. In this research, we collect data on soil health, crop productivity and economic impacts of integrating adaptively grazed, multi-species cover crop rotations into corn and soybean rotations on over 600 acres. Resulting analysis will be used to build a compelling evidence base and farmer toolkit for grazing cover crops.

Preliminary results show that a majority of farms experienced an increase in both microbial biomass and microbial diversity when grazing cover crops,

indicating that the practice is improving soil health and resilience.

Building on the success of these case studies and the numerous grazing cover crop field days we've held over the past three years, we will be expanding our grazing cover crop outreach and education with our partners. We begin working with an additional cohort of farms for research and demonstration in 2018.

Adaptive High Stock Density Grazing

Most grazing in Illinois and Indiana is continuous grazing rather than the more profitable and regenerative rotational grazing. The Pasture Project works in these states to help farmers shift to rotational Adaptive High Stock Density (AHSD) grazing. We work with NRCS and a cohort of established graziers to demonstrate this shift, providing technical assistance to each farm to implement and adjust AHSD grazing plans while also collecting soil and forage samples from each farm for laboratory analysis.

Cooperating farmers receive summaries from consultations, laboratory analyses, and recommendations for modifications to their grazing plans. Cooperating farms also host public field days, two of which took place in August 2017 and were attended by over 150 farmers, agency staff, and organizations. Three field days will be held in 2018. The outcomes from our individual farm support and the field days will be used to build broader outreach to other farmers, graziers and NRCS staff throughout Illinois and the Upper Midwest.

CROSSCUTTING STRATEGIES

- Broker grazing deals between public and private landowners and graziers
- Provide direct technical support and education to row-crop farmers to integrate cover-cropping and regenerative grazing into their operations
- Support grass-based farmers and graziers as they become advocates in their communities
- Work with farmer support organizations to help them better support regenerative grazing
- Build grazing knowledge base through on-farm research
- Widely communicate economic, environmental and social benefits of regenerative grazing and supporting practices
- Support shifts in policy, regulation, and funding streams to improve access to land and capital
- Connect impact investment to regenerative grazing practices and grass-fed supply chain

We have been actively engaging graziers, farmers, and organizations in Illinois to build a statewide strategy for advancing regenerative grazing. Along with our partners American Farmland Trust, the Conservation Fund, and the Liberty Prairie Foundation, we convened a group of 20 key stakeholders in March 2018 to lay the foundation for a regenerative grazing strategy working group in the state.

Public Land Grazing Pilots

The Pasture Project works with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources to pilot the use of regenerative grazing as a conservation management tool on multiple sites managed by the agency. We have built strong relationships with WI-DNR land managers and are currently piloting adaptive grazing leases on selected WI-DNR sites. The effort includes a University of Wisconsin research team to measure the environmental impacts on these pilot sites. Our early financial analysis clearly demonstrates not only cost savings to the WI-DNR but significant revenue generation to participating graziers as they increase their access to quality pasture. The environmental and economic impacts will continue to be assessed over the coming year as work on the sites progresses.

We are working with WI-DNR to add additional grazing sites. Our goal is to implement adaptive grazing on 16-18 public land sites (2,000 acres) in Wisconsin by 2020. We are also building a GIS decision support tool and grazing education toolkit

for WI-DNR. These tools, as well as the result of the pilot sites, will be shared as a model for expanding public grazing throughout the Upper Midwest.

Transforming the Kickapoo River Watershed

Since 2012, the Pasture Project has worked in the Kickapoo River Watershed, one of the most ecologically sensitive regions for water quality in the Upper Mississippi River Basin, to transition 20,000 agricultural acres into more sustainable management. As part of our watershed model, we are piloting the Whole Farm Coordinator (WFC) strategy in the Kickapoo. The WFC serves landowners and farmers to help them achieve their goals and integrate conservation practices and regenerative grazing. As a no-cost service, the WFC recommends a broad array of restorative agriculture practices, based on the resource concerns of the landowner. The WFC then uses various partners and technical experts to guide the landowner through the process of change.

In addition, we host outreach events monthly, where attendance continues to climb; over 1,100 people attended 25 events across the Kickapoo since August 2016.



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