

2020 Northeast Pasture Consortium Conference Proceedings January 15-16, Lake Morey Resort, 82 Clubhouse Road, Fairlee, VT

After evening dinner and before the start of the Producers Showcase, Dr. Sidney Bosworth and the Executive Committee along with former committee members presented Executive Director Jim Cropper with a plaque and a gift certificate as appreciation of his leadership as Director in sustaining the Northeast Pasture Consortium over the past 11 years. Jim had announced his desire to retire at the November Executive Committee teleconference. He said at that time he would stay on as Executive Director until the end of February 2020. He also was a charter member of the Northeast Pasture Consortium since its inception in 1995 when he was stationed with Agriculture Research Service's Pasture Systems and Watershed Management Research Unit at University Park, PA. Before that he was also a member and secretary of the Northeast Pasture Coordinating Committee, a precursor of the Northeast Pasture Consortium. He began working with that Committee when he began his duties in December 1987 as regional forage agronomist at the USDA-NRCS Northeast National Technical Center in Chester, PA.



Photo at left with Jim (tan jacket) receiving a "Grazing Champion" plaque from Dr. Sid Bosworth for "A lifetime of dedicated service to well-managed pastures and the human and ecological communities that benefit from them."

Jim was gratified for the outpouring of congratulations and kind attendance of so many former committee members and colleagues from ARS, Extension, and NRCS.

Producer Showcase

Kevin Jablonski, Executive Committee member, moderated the Producer Showcase session. One farmer from Vermont and one farmer from New Hampshire were featured this year.

Randy Robar, owner and operator of the "Kiss the Cow" dairy farm, in Barnard, VT was the first presenter. The title of his presentation was "Kiss the Cow Farm, An Unexpected Journey". Randy gave the history of starting out with just one cow at a very small farmette to a much larger dairy on part of a 500-acre Vermont Land Trust farm that is in Agricultural Land Preservation zone. He presented 5 themes along the Journey:

- This Was Not the Plan: How We Became Accidental Farmers.
- How the Farm Has Changed.
- Grazing Cows & Poultry
- Climate Change & Strain

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- Realities of Small-Scale Farming

This Was Not the Plan: How We Became Accidental Farmers.

Originally, they had a small farmette with just one cow. She went dry so they bought a second lactating cow. He quit his corporate job and he began raising pigs, chickens, built a maple sugar hut, started tapping maple trees for sap, grew fruit trees and raspberries. He had a small store to sell his farm-raised products.



Robar farmette, from one to two cows, using a garage as a cow barn.

How the Farm Has Changed.

When the Vermont Land Trust bought a 500-acre farm, he and three other people wanted to rent the farm. They convinced the Trust to rent the farm instead of selling it as the Trust attorney had recommended. It was placed in an Agricultural Preservation Area. He moved his operation to that farm. His cows now graze 75 acres of that farm. See pictures below showing the layout of the farm and a scene of the farmstead amid the grassland and another expanse of pasture. Kiss the Cow farm now process their own milk and have a farm store. They sell farm products from 50 small Vermont farms along with 9 of their own. They sell some raw milk, but they also pasteurize their milk. Some of it is made into ice cream which they sell at their store and at farmer markets. They also produce maple syrup and process 3000 chickens, ducks, and turkeys each year that they raise. See picture of the store and processing facilities below.

Grazing Cows & Poultry

They practice strip grazing without a back fence. Randy finds this cuts down on goldenrod, bedstraw, and brush that was prevalent on the farm before it was rented out. The poultry have

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access to pasture. They are housed in movable crates. Another picture below shows how this is done. The grazing season usually starts on May 15 and ends in early November.

How We've Changed



Movable poultry crates on pasture. The left picture shows the checker board pattern where the crates were. The first grazed are greening up.

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Kiss the cow farm store and their milk and poultry processing facilities

Climate Change and Strain

Randy said, “We seem to have weather patterns or episodes that last longer whether it be rainy or dry.” This makes it harder to harvest high quality hay and at times, interferes with pasturing livestock. Although they round bale dry hay, they are also making balage that is wrapped in plastic sheeting. It can be hard to get hay dry enough to bale without spoilage later on, or if it rains enough, the dry hay might be only good for mulch or bedding. Pastures can suffer from drought or too much rain. This can raise problems when rotationally grazing as it takes some forward contingency planning on what to do when either drought or too much rain occurs.

Realities of Small-Scale Farming

Why do small-scale farming?

- To feed our community
- To preserve and improve the land that sustains us
- To pass on this knowledge and experience to others who want to learn about this lifestyle
- To earn a living wage

They can feed their community with locally produced, wholesome food. In the meantime, they can preserve our heritage and improve the land that sustains us locally rather than depend on food sources from far-flung regions. To pass farming knowledge and experience onto others, he likes to use apprentices to help him operate the farm. They get room and board for their efforts, and he has a labor pool to do the farm work, processing milk and meat, and retailing farm products. During the summer, he hosts musical entertainment on Thursday nights. Three to five hundred people attend. This gives a real sense of community. Small-scale farming requires

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entrepreneurship to earn a living wage as commodity prices are too low so it has to be value-added sales.

Our second speaker of the evening was **Lora Goss**, Stonefen Farm, Pike, NH just one mile from the Connecticut River and upriver from Fairlee, VT just a few miles. Lora started her presentation about StoneFen Farm, LLC asking three questions: Is it all about the grass? Is it the breed of cattle? Is it the people? It takes all three to get the job done well when raising pastured livestock.



The Goss Family, Steve and Lora in the middle, surrounded by their children, daughter-in-law, and grandchild

Lora, a seventh generation Ayrshire milk cow farmer, kept up the tradition until her legs and knees gave out. She had daily milked over 50 head of Ayrshires before semi-retiring as a beef farmer. They began in 1982 with 2 Ayrshire heifers, 5 bred Hampshire sheep, and added 2 boys and 2 girls. The family moved to Pike, NH in 1998 when they purchased Stonefen Farm. They were milking the Ayrshire herd at that time. Some of the land needed to be cleared of pole-sized trees to provide more grass for the milking herd.



In 2006, the Gosses began working with the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). They installed a six strand high tensile aluminum wire perimeter fence around the pastureland. To provide water to the pasture paddocks, they installed a frost-free hydrant and seasonal water lines to fill portable water troughs for each paddock.

In 2009, with NRCS assistance, they established 2000 feet of grass waterways previously called swales and 4000 feet of underground