

Northeast Pasture Consortium News Update January 2016

Linking Graziers, Researchers, Extension, and Technicians

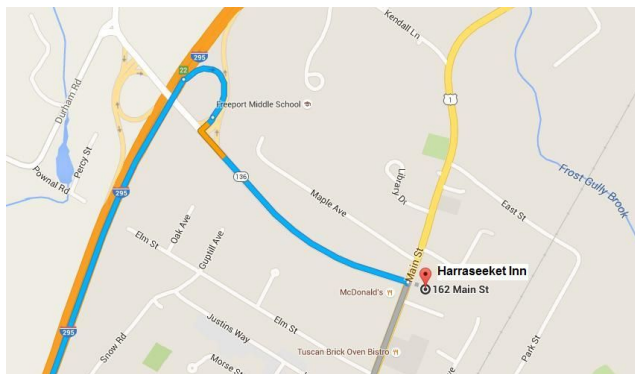
<http://www.grazingguide.net>

James Cropper, Executive Director & Editor

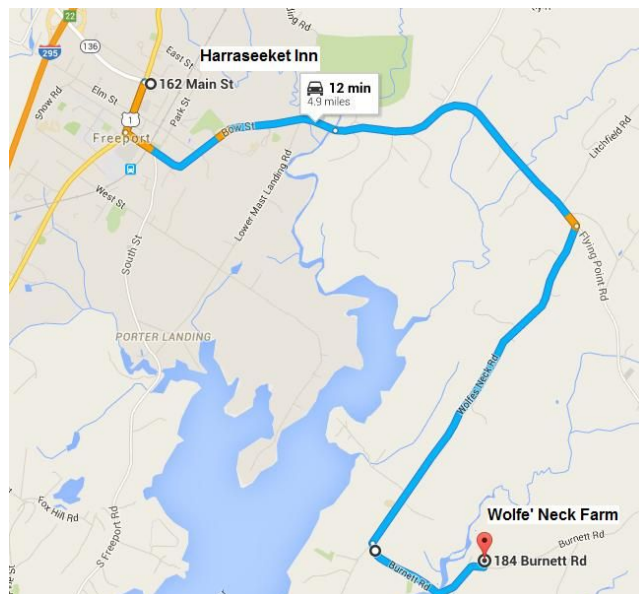


2016 Northeast Pasture Consortium Annual Conference & Meeting

Our annual conference and meeting in 2016 will be at the Harraseeket Inn on March 16-17 in Freeport, Maine. The Harraseeket Inn is located a half mile from I-295 Exit 22 at 162 Main Street. This is within 5 miles of Wolfe's Neck Farm where a new program has been initiated, the Organic Dairy Farmer Training Program. We have a morning tour set up to visit Wolfe's Neck Farm on Friday, March 18, after our conference.



Harraseeket Inn Location in Freeport, ME



Directions to Wolfe's Neck Farm from Harraseeket Inn

To make **room reservations** use the following

contact information: **Harraseeket Inn**, 162 Main Street, Freeport, ME 04032; phone number: (207) 865-9377. The **room rate is \$108.00 per night** (includes breakfast), plus taxes and gratuities. **Each attendee needing a hotel room please note you need to make these room reservations by February 15, 2016 to hold this rate. Tell them you are with the NE Pasture Consortium.** It is very important for those needing a hotel room to make reservations at the Harraseeket Inn so that we meet our guaranteed number of room rentals. Reservations received after February 15th will be accepted on a space available basis as they will be released to the general public.



The **registration fee** for all public sector members attending the annual conference is **\$275**. This includes the cost of coffee breaks and lunch for each of the two days of the meeting and an evening dinner on March 16. **Register by March 9, 2016** either on-line or by contacting Cheryl Herrick at: cheryl.herrick@uvm.edu or postal address: UVM Center for Sustainable Agriculture, 23 Mansfield Ave., Burlington, VT 05401, or by phone: 802-656-5459. **Be sure to use the NE Pasture Consortium Annual Conference registration form sent with this newsletter (check payment only) or on-line at:** <https://www.regonline.com/builder/site/Default.aspx?EventID=1791135>

Directions to the Harraseeket Inn, Freeport, ME:

From the South:

- Take I-95 North to exit 52, Falmouth,
- Go through tollbooth and take the exit for

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- I-295 North,
- Take exit 22,
- Take a left off the exit ramp onto ME-136,
- Follow 1/2 mile to stop light, the Harra-seeket Inn will be directly in front of you.

From the North:

- Take I-295 South to exit 22,
- Take a right off the exit,
- Follow 1/2 mile to stop light, the Harra-seeket Inn will be directly in front of you.

From Portland International Jetport:

- Head northwest on Al McKay Ave/Jetport Access Rd toward Jetport Blvd,
- Continue on Jetport Access Rd (0.4 mi)
- Turn right onto Congress St. (2.0 mi),
- Use the right lane to take the I-295 N/US Route 1 N ramp to Falmouth (0.2 mi),
- Merge onto I-295 N/U.S. 1 N and continue to follow I-295 N (17.8 mi),
- Take exit 22 for ME-125/ME-136 toward Freeport (0.1 mi)
- Turn left onto ME-125 S/ME-136 S (0.4 mi),
- Turn right onto Main St, destination on the left.



2016 Northeast Pasture Consortium Annual Meeting Agenda

Wednesday, March 16

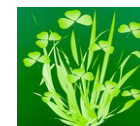
Time	Activity
8:00 AM	Welcome & Introduction of Participants - Jim Cropper, Executive Director (Certified Forage & Grassland Professional) presiding, Casco Bay Room
8:30 AM	Session 1 – Northeast Pasture Consortium Celebrates 20 years of Pasture Research & Advocacy - Moderator, Les Vough, Casco Bay Room Speakers: James Cropper , Executive Director, Northeast Pasture Consortium, Greensboro, NC – <i>Accentuating the Positive - Accomplishments for Pasture Research, Education, and Technical Assistance fostered by NEPC members since 1996</i> Ed Rayburn , Extension Specialist-Agronomy, WVU, Morgantown, WV – <i>Rebirth of pasture: past, present, and future</i>
9:30 AM	Break - Casco Bay Room
10:00 AM	Session 2 – Orchardgrass Die-off Update on Findings From Virginia - Moderator, Jim Cropper, Casco Bay Room Speakers: Gordon Jones , Doctoral Candidate, Dept. of Crop & Soil Environmental Sciences, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA - <i>An update on orchardgrass persistence research in Virginia</i> James Cropper , Executive Director, Northeast Pasture Consortium, Greensboro, NC - <i>Attack of the Billbug</i>
11:00 AM	Session 3 - Riparian grazing management update - Moderator, Howard Skinner, Casco Bay Room Speaker: Erik Hagan , Riparian Conservation Planning Project Coordinator for ARS, Graduate student in Ecology, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA - <i>Shifting Perspectives in Riparian Conservation Planning: Trade-offs, Options and Opportunities in Managed Ecosystems</i>
12:00 PM	Lunch - Maine Harvest Dining Room
1:00 PM	Session 4 - What's New in Forage Plant Breeding - Moderator, Sid Bosworth, Casco Bay Room Speakers: Dr. Yousef Papadopoulos , Research Scientist, Kentville Research & Development Centre, Forage Breeding, Science & Technology Branch/Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Truro, Nova Scotia - <i>Genetic Improvements in Pasture Species – What's New and What's Needed</i> Dr. Heathcliffe Riday , Research Geneticist, US Dairy Forage Center, Madison, WI, - <i>New Traits and Improvements in Old Traits in Forage Legumes</i> Joseph Schmidlen , Northeast Territory Manager, Barenbrug USA, Elkins, West Virginia -
2:45 PM	Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship Program Speaker: Laura Paine , Program Director, Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship Program, Madison, WI
3:15 PM	Poster Break – (authors present), Casco Bay Room

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Time	Activity
4:00 PM	Session 5 – Risk Management Tools for Forage & Pasture Producers - Moderator, Susan Parry, Casco Bay Room Speakers: Erin Roche , Crop Insurance Education Program Manager, Cooperative Extension, University of Maine, Orono, ME & Amanda May , Program Specialist, USDA-Farm Service Agency, Maine State Office, Bangor, ME - Risk Management Options for Forage and Pasture
5:15 PM	Adjourn
5:30 PM	Dinner – Merrymeeting Room
7:00 PM-	Evening Session - Producer Showcase - Moderator, Diane Schiviera, Casco Bay Room
9:00 PM	Speakers: Lisa and Phil Webster , Owners & Operators, North Star Sheep Farm, 205 Varney Mill Rd Windham, ME - Pasture Philosophy Gabe Clark , Owner & Operator, Cold Spring Ranch, 1 Reed Road, North New Portland, ME - Why I Grow Grass. Steve Morrison , Owner & Operator, Clovercrest Farm, 159 Atkinson Road, Charleston, ME - Increasing cow numbers and reducing grain feeding on an organic dairy

Thursday, March 17

8:00 AM	Session 6 – Transitioning dairy cows to a no grain or high forage diet - Moderator, Andre Brito, Casco Bay Room Speakers: Sabrina Greenwood , Assistant Professor, Department of Animal Science, University of Vermont, Burlington, VT - Milk production and health of grazing dairy cows Jessica Williamson , Forage Extension Specialist, Department of Plant Science, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA - Annual forage crops: Overcoming challenges and maximizing opportunities for improved productivity Sarah Flack , Sarah Flack Consulting, 5455 Duffy Hill Rd, Enosburg Falls, VT - Zero grain dairy: Lessons learned from farm successes and disasters
9:45 AM	Break – Casco Bay Room
10:15 AM	Pasture-Based Farming Research and Demonstration Needs Discussion Concurrent Sessions - Moderator, Don Wild, Casco Bay Room Private Sector and Public Sector meet together in groups by research topic. Topics: 1. Riparian Pasture Grazing Management to protect water quality and the landuse 2. Orchardgrass Die-Off Investigation Action Plan adjustments 3. New Forage Varieties to enhance and extend pasture productivity 4. Transitioning dairy cows to a no grain or high forage diet 5. Organic milk fatty acid composition (omega-3 to omega-6 ratio) maintaining it year-around at the farm and maintaining it at the milk processing plant 6. Grass-fed beef fatty acid composition (omega-3 to omega-6 ratio) Does it matter? Research and education opportunities in enhancing the ratio and keeping it when preparing beef for the table.

Time	Activity
	(Discuss progress, funding initiatives, demonstration projects, coordination efforts, collaboration opportunities, explore new directions)
12:15 PM	Lunch – Maine Harvest Dining Room
1:15 PM	Research/Demonstration Directions and USDA Agency Reports - Jim Cropper, Executive Director presiding, Casco Bay Room Cliff Hawbaker , Chairman, PA Grazing Lands Coalition, Chambersburg, PA - Ten Million and One Grazable Acres in the Northeast Concurrent Session Reports & Discussion ARS report – NIFA report - Jim Dobrowolski, Washington, DC NRCS Report - Sid Brantly, Washington, DC
3:30 PM	Break – Casco Bay Room
4:00 PM	Business Meeting – Les Vough, Public Sector Co-Chair and Diane Schiviera, Private Sector Co-Chair, Presiding, Casco Bay Room Election of Private Sector and Public Sector members-at-large to serve on the Executive Committee of the NE Pasture Consortium Other business to come to the Floor, such as resolutions and changes to Consortium research, education, and financial & technical assistance priorities. <i>Jim Cropper, Executive Director</i> ; Thank you to the outgoing Executive Committee members. Welcome to the new Executive Committee members, and Announcement of the 2016 Public and Private Sector Co-Chairs.
5:00 PM	Adjourn

Conference Overview

Our opening session will take a look back at the first twenty years of the Northeast Pasture Consortium. It is important to take note of what the membership has accomplished over that span of time to foster the rebirth of pasture as an important land use. Much has been done to strengthen pasture research, education, and technology transfer, especially given the reality of shrinking budgets in real dollars and keen competition from other worthy agricultural programs. Jim Cropper will give the progress highlights that were fostered by our members in academia, Extension, ARS, NRCS, and the pasture-based farmer community. Ed Rayburn will follow-up with a look at the rebirth of pasture - past, present, and future.

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Close-up of orchardgrass die-off in a hayfield

The second session, **Orchardgrass Die-off Update on Findings from Virginia**, is a follow-up to the orchardgrass die-off session we held at our 2015 Conference. We knew that Virginia Tech University at Blacksburg was involved in trying to solve what was causing orchardgrass die-off in their hayfields and pastures. When we contacted them, we found that a doctoral student, Gordon Jones, under the direction of Dr. Ben Tracy was doing an early spring investigation in Virginia and several of our southern states in the Northeast. We collaborated with him to find sites with failing orchardgrass stands so he could visit them and do an assessment. Gordon is returning to show us the results of his 2015 research work on orchardgrass hay stands. Jim Cropper will examine the billbug (research also done at Virginia Tech) whose attack on orchardgrass stands also reduces stand persistence but is more patchy in its destruction. The principal investigator of two billbug species at Virginia Tech is now retired and no one else on East Coast is working on this forage pest. Work in the Pacific Northwest is mainly targeting billbug damage in orchardgrass seed production fields.

The last morning session is a **Riparian Grazing Management update** from the Riparian Conser-

vation Team of USDA-ARS Pasture Systems and Watershed Management Research Unit and the Pennsylvania State University Riparia Center Director, Dr. Robert Brooks. Erik Hagan, Project Coordinator, will give us the update on what the team has learned over the past year on managing riparian pasture areas to protect water quality and restore stream corridors while still providing forage for livestock on working farms. This session is an important one for anyone involved in conservation planning of pastured riparian areas or has this landuse on their farm.

Session four kicks off the afternoon presentations - **What's New in Forage Plant Breeding**. Sid Bosworth will have speakers that can tell us what is new in breeding new forage cultivars that improve on characteristics of forage legumes and grasses that we have in our pastures now or wished they were there to improve livestock performance.

Just before the poster paper session we will have a short session on the Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship Program. Dairy farming is an important part of rural economies. Each cow generates approximately \$20,000 of economic activity in the local community each year. But new farmers face significant barriers and are not entering the profession at a rate that offsets the loss of retiring producers. The U.S. loses 5-10% of its dairy farms every year. Because the average age of farmers is 59 years old and many do not have an identified successor, farm loss is expected to continue. Laura Paine, Program Director of DGA, will present their solution to the problem.

Our poster paper session follows next. This is an opportunity to see how other research projects are progressing or seeing how that research is used to improve the sustainability and economic viability of pasture-based farms in the Northeast. Farmers work with educators and technicians to apply best management practices to

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their pastures based on the latest research to improve productivity, livestock well-being, water quality, and the healthfulness of meat and milk products from pastured livestock. Or, it may be a poster paper that shows how the products produced on pasture are processed and marketed locally for their wholesomeness and safety.

The fifth session wraps up the first day's daytime program looking at **Risk Management Tools for Forage & Pasture Producers**. Erin Roche and Amanda May will tell us about risk management programs that the Risk Management Agency and the Farm Service Agency of USDA have that can help farmers weather the vagaries of the weather or markets. Their programs are not just for cash grain, cotton, and peanut growers anymore.

Our evening session is called the **Producer Showcase**. Diane Schivera is the moderator of this session. Diane has three Maine farmers lined up to speak about their operations. Phil Webster owns and operates North Star Sheep Farm with his wife, Lisa. Gabe Clark owns and operates a grass-fed beef operation, Cold Spring Ranch. Steve Morrison rounds out the evening session by talking about his Clovercrest Farm, an organic dairy farm.

The following morning, March 17, we begin our last technical session, **Transitioning dairy cows to a no grain or high forage diet**, hosted by Dr. Andre Brito. Three speakers will address the issues involved in doing so and the pitfalls that could ensue if not done wisely.

The remainder of the morning the two sectors of the Consortium, Private and Public will deliberate on where pasture research and outreach ought to head next to help pasture-based farmers better manage their livestock, pastures, farm enterprise, and marketing. The Consortium membership will split up into groups to attend concurrent sessions that focus on current research topics of greatest

interest to redirect effort, enhance research methodology, foster collaborative efforts, and explore funding grant opportunities. There are six topics on the agenda for this session. See agenda for the listing.

In the afternoon, we wrap up the conference with a **Reports Session** and the **business meeting**. The Reports Session will provide an hour and a half to report to each other what we concluded during the concurrent sessions on additional research and outreach needs to improve pasture-based farming or to demonstrate it works well environmentally as well as economically. We then move on to USDA agency reports from Agricultural Research Service, National Institute of Food and Agriculture, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Our conference is being held just a day apart from the Maine Grass Farmers Conference. Their tentative agenda is shown below. The Alfond Campus is about a 1 hour drive up north on I-295 that connects up with I-95 N. You can attend our tour of the Wolfe's Neck Farm on Friday morning, March 18, and when it concludes, head on up to Hinckley.

2016 Maine Grass Farmers Conference March 19th

Alfond Campus KVCC (Hinkley, Me)

Directions to Kennebec Valley Community
College, Hinkley Campus

From I-95 North or South: Take Exit 133, Skowhegan/Fairfield (US-201). Merge onto US-201 N/Skowhegan Road. KVCC's Harold Alfond Campus is approximately 6.6 miles on the left.

Tentative Agenda

8:30-9:00 AM Registration

9-9:15 Welcome

9:15- 10:30 **Sarah Flack**, Sarah Flack Consulting,
"The Creative Application of Grazing Science"

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10:30-11:00 coffee and break

11:00-12:00 (Concurrent sessions)

Kimberly Hagan, Vermont Pasture Network

"Pasture basics...designing a system for your farm"

Dan Hudson, University of Vermont Extension

"The plot thickens -The pasture toolbox: What should you expect from your forages, and what should they expect from you?"

Brett Chedzoy, Cornell Cooperative Extension

"Outwintering and Bale grazing"

Sid Bosworth, University of Vermont Extension "Putting some Buzz in your Pastures: Improving Bee Health"

12:00-1:00 lunch

1:00-2:00 **Brett Chedzoy**, Cornell Cooperative Extension.
"Silvopasture: What's its potential in the Northeast?"

2:15-3:30 (Concurrent Sessions)

Sarah Flack, Sarah Flack Consulting, "Preventing Grazing Pitfalls: Learning from our Livestock and Pastures"

Ben Hartwell, Sebago Lake Ranch, "New technologies in fencing and livestock management"

Joe Emenheiser, University of Vermont Extension.

"Evaluating beef animals...indicators of carcass quality"

Nate Leonard, Cornell Cooperative Extension, "All that plastic....what is possible for recycling all that bale wrap and plastic silo covers and other plastic used on the farm?"

A conference coming up quickly in February is the Winter Green-Up Grass-Fed Grazing Conference near Albany, NY. Below is the information about it and the agenda.

The Eighth Annual Winter Green-Up Grass-Fed Grazing Conference

Topics:

Mineralization of the soil, a chef's view of buying local meat products, stress-free handling of animals, genetics of the grazing animal, finishing an animal on grass ...

Dates:

Friday, **February 12**, 2016, 8:30AM to 9:00PM

Saturday February **13**, 2016, 9:00AM to 5:00PM

Location:

The Century House · Rte 9 (Exit 7 off the Northway) · Latham, NY 12210

Introduction:

Cornell Cooperative Extension and Black Queen Angus are proud to present the 8th Annual Winter Green-Up Grazing Conference. We are really excited about our lineup of speakers this year, including our keynote speakers, Neil Dennis, a Saskatchewan farmer who has spoken at many conferences on various topics related to grazing and holistic management, and Chip Hines, speaker and author of *Time to Change*, *How Did We Get It So Wrong*, and *A Slantwise Guide To Prosperity*.

Agenda:

Friday, February 12

8:30 – 9:15 – Registration, coffee, pastries, vendor set-up

9:15 – 10:30 – Neil Dennis, Sunnybrae Farm, covers a topic with a very interesting title: "*If You Are Going To Be Lazy, Get Good At It*." He talks about how he handles 1,000 animals without stress to the animals or the operator.

10:30 – 11:00 Break, visit with vendors

11:00 – Noon – Bill Roberts, 12 Stones Grass-land Beef, discusses mineralization of the soil and the impact it has on your herds' health and profitability.

Noon – 1:30 Lunch – a brief presentation from vendors and visit with other producers

1:30 – 2:45 – Brian Alberg, Executive Chef, The Red Lion Inn and Jeremy Stanton, Chef/Owner of Fire Roasted Catering and The Meat Market in Great Barrington, discusses their commitment to buying local meat products. They also discuss some of the challenges of buying local, such as consistent quality, availability and price point.

2:45 – 3:45 – Stretch break

3:00 – 4:30 Neil Dennis continues his talk on the stress free handling of animals and the building of soil health on his farm.

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Saturday, February 13

8:00 – 9:00 Vendor booths open, speakers, books for sale

9:00 – 10:15 Chip Hines, Colorado Rancher, presents information on genetics, Grazing and Management and how they interconnect.

10:45 – Noon Bill Roberts, 12 Stones Grassland Beef, discusses what it takes to finish an animal on grass at low choice grade.

Noon – 1:30 Lunch, vendor presentations and visit with other producers

1:30 – 2:30 John Moody, Farm to Consumer Legal Defense Fund, discusses the legal and economic challenges related to the productions of food. John will talk about animal welfare and how it is perceived by the public.

2:30-3:45 Chip Hines – During this afternoon session, Chip talks about an interesting topic entitled “*Are You Caught Up In The Company Store System?*” He also discusses how adding input costs does not automatically increase profitability.

For more info go to:

<http://blogs.cornell.edu/capitalareaagandhortprogram/winter-green-up-2016/>



Grass-fed beef on a NY pasture

And then, if you are not conferenced out by April, there is another conference that may be of interest to you grass-fed beef and sheep farmers

and Extension livestock specialists and NRCS grazing lands specialists. It is the big daddy of grass-fed conferences, the Grassfed Exchange Conference. This national conference is held around the Country each year. This year it is going to be held in the southeast US before the weather gets too hot and humid.

2016 Grassfed Exchange Conference "Regenerating Lives One Farm at a Time"

Early Bird Registration

Save money. You only have until March 31st, 2016 to receive special discount pricing for this year's conference. So don't wait until it's too late, register now.

For full conference & banquet:

Individual: \$325

Early Bird \$275

Student (through March 31st): \$125

Student (after March 31st): \$150

(Student registration includes pasture tour)

One day pass \$150

Children Under 11 & Under Free Admission

Lunch will be provided each day of the conference.

Space is limited so please register by March 31.

Pasture walk tours are an additional charge of \$80. A one-day pass can be purchased for \$150 per person. Extra "Taste of the South" social tickets can also be purchased for \$50 per person. Lunch will be provided.

When?

April 27th through 29th, 2016

Where At?

This year's conference will be held at the Georgia National Fairgrounds and Agricenter, **Perry, Georgia**. (Editor's note: 100 mi. south of Atlanta on I-75)

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What's Happening?

We are excited to be able to provide you with one day of pasture walk tours and two days full of presentations with information and ideas that will certainly be exciting, enlightening, and help attendees improve their skills and operations.

Pasture Walk Tours

You will get to tour White Oak Pastures and the UGA Experiment Station at Watkinsville and Farmview Market in Madison, GA. There will be a lot to see and learn. You will not want to miss this chance to see with your own eyes and ask questions. Be sure to register for the pasture walk tours.

2-Day Conference

We've got a great lineup of speakers for this year's conference, here are a few...

Blaine Hitzfield, Seven Sons Family Farms, IN
Burke Teichert, Range Management Consultant, WY

Doug Peterson, State Soil Health
Conservationist. USDA-NRCS, MO

Dr. Joseph Mercola, creator of Mercola.com, #1
natural health website
and others.

"Taste of the South" Social

Socialize with speakers, sponsors, exhibitors, and producers. Everyone will taste some local foods, grassfed meats, and dairy products. The meats will be prepared by pitmaster Myron Mixon. Entertainment with Teddy Gentry and The Rockit City Band following the social.

Registration

Tickets for the full conference can be purchased for individuals. Special discount pricing is available for students. We certainly hope you and other members of your family and operation can make it out to this year's conference.

One-Day passes can also be purchased for those wishing to attend only one day of the conference.

Hotel & Travel

We've got a block of rooms at Comfort Inn & Suites and Holiday Inn Express. You can also travel by air to Atlanta and drive south to Perry.

Networking & Socialize

Attending our conference provides you with the opportunity to meet with, speak with, and learn from other producers from around the country.

We encourage you to share the information about this year's conference with your friends and mailing list.

Cancellation Policy

Up to 30 days prior to the conference, a full refund will be given. Less than 30 days, we will refund half of the registration fees.

For more information about the conference go to Website: <http://www.grassfedexchange.com/>.



Time for a bit of levity. Kathy Voth has an entertaining style of writing about anything, including dung beetles. Since we had a session about them at our 2015 Conference, this recent article out of *On Pasture* caught my eye and attention. It is not only entertaining, but highly informative. By the way, if you are not a subscriber to the weekly online magazine, and you are a pasture enthusiast, you need to **subscribe NOW**. Use hotlink at the end of the article on the next page.



The Poop on Dung Beetles

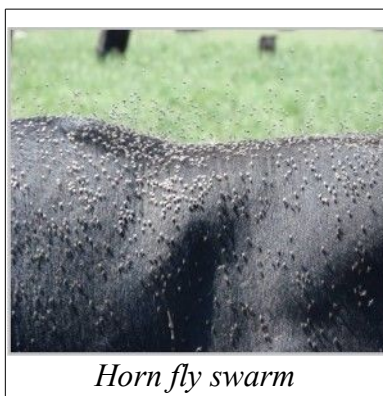
By Kathy Voth November 30, 2015 *On Pasture*

What would you say to a 95% decrease in horn flies thanks to dung beetles? They do that and a lot more for us. Here's a list, plus a suggestion on keeping more beetles in your pastures if you find you do not have enough. Care must be taken not to kill them off inadvertently with livestock insecticides.

Troy Bishopp (the Grass Whisperer and *On Pasture* author) says that if he comes to visit your pastures, one of the first things he'll look at are the manure pats. Why? Because they can tell him a lot about the quality of what the cattle are eating, how often they're being moved, and even where they like to hang out. They can also tell him if you've got beneficial insects that are helping you manage pests. Yep, Troy will be looking for those signs that you've got dung beetles. In fact, the more I learn about these little bugs, the more time I spend looking at poop too!

Here's what dung beetles do for us:

Reduce Fly Problems



Horn fly swarm

Horn flies (*Haematobia irritans*) and face flies (*Musca autumnalis*) both need manure pats to breed and incubate. Dung beetles destroy manure pats so that the flies have no place to party

and their larvae have no where to live. Some research has found a 95% decrease in horn flies thanks to dung beetles. That's a big deal when you consider that horn flies can cause a 15 to 50 pound reduction in calf weaning weights. Some researchers estimate that farmers and ranchers spend \$60 million a year on controlling insects. So the next time you see a dung beetle, thank it for helping save you money.

Make More Forage Available to Your Livestock

Since livestock poop where they eat, that can mean that from 5 to 10% of the forage in a pasture is covered with manure and won't be eaten. That's not a lot but when your margins are slim, every little bit counts. Of course, you might also look at it as forage that's being trampled and returned to the soil, and in that case it's all good.

Put Nitrogen in Your Soil

All that fertilizer that your livestock are scattering on pasture, and maybe even laying out in a more concentrated fashion with management intensive grazing, is a great start to improving the fertility of your soil. But you need dung beetles to complete the cycle. If left on the surface, up to 80% of manure nitrogen can be lost into the atmosphere. Dung beetles reduce that loss by quickly incorporating manure into the soil by rolling it up and hauling it underground, thus incorporating nitrogen into the soil. The dung beetle's plan for those little poop pills is that they will feed its larvae. But the larvae use only 40-50% of the brood ball. The rest of that nutrient-rich organic matter is left behind for soil microbes, fungi, and bacteria to use for creating humus. Between the nitrogen, the tunnels that increase soil's water-holding capacity, and the addition of organic matter to your soil, those little dung beetles are doing a lot of good work



for you!

Keeping Dung Beetles in Your Pastures

It's likely that you have dung beetles already, though you may not have as many as you'd like. You can increase their numbers by changing the way you currently manage for parasites in your herd. Reduce your insecticide use, and keep in mind that Ivermectin can reduce dung beetle survival. Research has shown that the injectable version reduces dung beetle survival for 1 to 2 weeks, and the pour-on reduces survival of larvae for 1 to 3 weeks. The bolus version is most harmful to dung beetles, with effects lasting as much as 20 weeks.

-See more at:

<http://onpasture.com/2015/11/30/the-poop-on-dung-beetles/#sthash.xPXg1Vuj.dpuf>

Here is some better news about organic dairy farming from Bob Parsons at UVM. It still revolves around getting the best milk production that you can with the best milk producing ration for the money by being shrewd on what it costs you to feed that ration. Lowest cost ration is not necessarily what to aim for. First, can you produce most of the ration at the farm for less than it costs to import it from someone else? Are you making the most of the pasture season by extending it with summer or winter annuals when you have the cropland acres to do so? Or, just doing a better job of managing the pasture so that the summer slump is not so severe or the fall uptick in growth is maximized by not stressing the perennials too much by grazing the sward too close or too often earlier in the year? Be sure you have enough pasture for the cows it needs to support. It makes the last question much easier to accomplish. Do not scrimp on pasture acres.

Profitability of Organic Dairy Farms Up Slightly in 2014

By Bob Parsons, Ph.D, UVM Extension

From January 27, 2016 *NODPA E-Newsletter*

(See full charts on the page after this article.)

A study on the economics of organic dairy, involving 35 Vermont dairy farms for the 2014 tax year, found that Return on Assets (ROA) increased slightly from 1.6% (2013) to 1.9% in 2014. The study was conducted with the cooperation of the University of Vermont Extension, NOFA-Vermont, Vermont organic dairy farmers, and the generous financial support from Stonyfield Farms, Yankee Farm Credit, Vermont Agency of Agriculture, and Green Mountain Feeds.

Data was collected from farm visits and compiled to compare balance sheets and accrual income for the 2014 tax year. The farms ranged in size from 26.5 to 98.5 cows. All farms have been certified organic for at least 5 years. Only one of the farms raised some grain, and 5 of the farms did not any feed grain for at least part of the year.

For 2014, the farms in the study averaged 57.7 (56.2 in 2013) cows producing 12,765 lbs. (13,144 lbs. in 2013) of milk per cow and sold 749,955 lbs. (739,986 lbs. in 2013) of milk per farm. Average milk price for the year was \$35.09/cwt, up \$1.40/cwt from 2013. The farms averaged a net revenue of \$47,603 before any charge for unpaid owner labor and management and principal payments were made. A charge of \$37,000 for family living costs was used to represent payment to the owner, leaving a Return on Assets of 1.90% vs. 1.6% in 2013.

On average, the farms are getting along, however, there is reason for concern as 10 of the 35 farms in the study failed to provide enough in-

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come for a positive return on assets (ROA) and to meet family living needs. The sustainability of these farms is highly questionable.

The largest expenses were purchased feed (34.2% of total expenses), repairs and supplies (13.3%), labor (11.7%), and depreciation (11.2%). Of the purchased feed, 92.5% was for grain supplement. Compared to 2013, farm level organic production expenses increased about \$6000 while revenue increased \$8800. While this helps explain the increase in ROA, some is attributed to lower grain costs by farms beginning to produce grain free milk.

To get a better analysis of the data, the herds were examined by profit groups, which shows a sizable difference between the farms. Each group was 11-12 farms, and ranked by overall farm profitability. The three groups showed returns of 5.39%, 1.69%, and -1.95%, respectively. The High Profit group averaged more cows per farm (69.0), more milk per cow (15,115 lbs.), and a mid-range milk price (\$35.00/cwt) as compared to the Middle Profit and Low Profit groups.

The Low Profit group averaged only 57.3 cows producing 11,203 lbs. of milk per cow at a farm price of \$34.39 per cwt. In comparison to the High Profit group, the Low Profit group produces 3,910 lbs. less milk per cow and milks 12 fewer cows.

The Middle Profit group averaged 11 fewer cows than the Low Profit group but produce 703 lbs. more milk per cow (11,906 lbs.) and have the lowest expenses on a per farm basis, with expenses \$52,905 lower than the low profit group. On a per cow basis, the Middle Profit group averaged \$273 lower expenses than the Low Profit group. The key to the profitability was in the High Profit group, averaging net farm revenue of \$1372 per cow vs. \$1010 for the Middle Group, and only \$143 for the Low Profit group. When considering the High Profit group has

more cows, it's no surprise the farms with more milk per cow and more cows have a higher ROA.



The High Profit group had the highest expenses on a per farm and per cow basis. It's common behavior among businesses to spend more when you have more. Thus earning a higher income allows the High Profit group to have more money available for repairs and reinvestment that the Low Profit group is likely putting off. Interest is not a major expense category for any of the groups as the highest debt/asset ratio was 29.3% for the Low Profit group and only 18.1% for the High Profit group.

Different from last year, the High and Middle Profit groups are spending more on feed per cow at \$1459 and \$1343, as compared to the Low Profit group at \$1311.

There is another way to keep expenses under control, or as described in Farm Credit's Dairy Farm Summary, being "tight with a buck." The Middle Profit group had the lowest expenses per cow for bedding, labor, repairs, supplies, and utilities, breeding, and custom hire on a per cows basis. It appears this group fits the reputation of the Vermont Yankee Farmer of being tight with their money. This strategy may not fit everyone but works for some farmers.

Purchased feed is usually the largest expense on dairy farms. *Two farms in the study have not fed grain for at least 5 years and have maintained profitability.* One of the farms purchases minerals. These two farms milked 53.5 and 46 cows, producing 7536 and 7160 lbs. of milk per cow in 2014. However, by eliminating purchased grain, they finished the year with net farm revenue of

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\$65,131 and \$25,399, respectively, to pay for owner family living expenses. These farms ended the year with a ROA of 5.8% and -0.07%, respectively. Both of these farms are now supplying Organic Valley with grass-fed milk who today is paying an average additional premium of \$5/cwt.

There are three other farms in the study that have discontinued feeding grain for only part of the year so it is difficult to make an assessment for those farms. However, the ROA for these 3 farms are 5.4%, 0.9%, and -5.6%. There does not seem to be a pattern among these farms, but it will be interesting to compare them in 2015 when they will receive a higher milk price premium for their milk.

There is little doubt that organic has provided a saving lifeline to Vermont's small scale dairy farms. In discussing challenges with organic dairy farmers, more than 75% believe they would not be in business today if they did not have the option to go organic.

What does the future hold? This is a big question as nearly 30% of the farms cannot pay the owner a reasonable wage for unpaid labor and management. These farms are not economically sustainable. There is less likelihood that the next generation will be interested, willing, or able to take over a farm that cannot make breakeven returns. In the long term, these farms will most likely not survive, leaving a question as to where more organic milk will be sourced.

The question of the next generation to operate Vermont's organic farms remains a challenge. During data collection, the question of long term transition came up repeatedly. We have profitable farms with no identified successor, and we have farms that are profitable for one family but not profitable enough to support 2 families during a transition process. Clearly the question of who will be operating Vermont's organic dairy farms

in 10 years is a major question facing the organic sector.

It is also clear that some of the organic dairy farms either need a higher milk price or lower feed expenses to become more profitable. For a number of farms in the study, organic grazing rules limit the ability to add more cows as they have limited pasture availability. The milk price did increase in 2015, and may rise more in 2016. The premium for grass-fed milk adds an additional option for some of the farms to increase revenue. As discussed above, not feeding grain can be done profitably. Add a price premium and it looks much more appealing, but it also has management challenges.

So this brings up some big questions facing the future of Vermont organic dairy farms. Can farm milk prices continue to increase to help cover rising production costs? Will the market be able to charge more without losing customers? Can farmers find ways to reduce production costs to increase overall profitability? These are major discussion points to consider for the long term viability of organic dairy and their importance to the rural Vermont landscape.

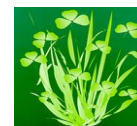
In conclusion, organic farms are getting by. Organic production is not the road to riches for many; however, it has been a key vehicle of survival for many of the smaller farms who likely would be out of business if they had not had the option to go organic. Higher milk prices are needed but can the market absorb a higher price without losing consumer demand? While the coming years likely will not see an immediate loss of organic dairy farms, there should be concern for long term viability and a sustainable and healthy supply of organic milk from Vermont farms. Without a higher price, organic dairy farms have only the same options they had available when on the conventional treadmill; add more cows and produce more milk per cow to meet rising expenses.

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2014 Vermont Organic Dairy Farms Averages (N=35) Reported by Profitability Group



	Bottom Third N=12	Middle Third N=11	Top Third N=12	All Farms N=35
Average # of cows	57.3	45.8	69.0	57.7
Lbs shipped total	637,796	536,950	1,057,368	749,955
Lbs shipped/cow	11,203	11,906	15,115	12,765
Milk price	\$34.39	\$35.97	\$35.00	\$35.09
Receipts				
Milk sales (a)	218,530	192,786	367,928	261,661
Dairy cattle sales	4,158	1,598	5,088	3,672
Cull cow sales	10,147	4,591	15,129	10,109
Bob/Veal calf sales	1,927	678	2,440	1,710
Crop sales	7,000	1,724	1,673	3,516
Government payments	899	513	1,252	899
Patronage dividends	1,483	1,226	3,023	1,930
Custom work	0	1,179	23	378
Syrup	464	1,593	1,964	1,333
Timber	0	351	5,014	1,829
Other	782	4,687	4,864	3,409
Total Cash Receipts (b)	\$245,391	\$210,927	\$408,396	\$290,447
Accrual Revenue Adjustments				
Livestock inventory	(6,523)	3,054	(3,237)	(2,386)
Breeding livestock purchases	(583)	(55)	(1,117)	(600)
Accounts receivable (c)	(565)	2,470	3,745	1,866
Hay	(5,435)	438	(2,560)	(2,603)
Grain	(2,315)	17	(33)	(800)
Total Accrual Revenue (d)	(\$15,421)	\$5,924	(\$3,202)	(\$4,523)
Total Farm Revenue (e)	\$229,970	\$216,851	\$405,194	\$285,924
Expenses				
Auto and truck expenses	1,053	1,795	2,089	1,641
Bedding	5,535	4,314	11,934	7,345
Breeding	2,768	2,133	3,562	2,841
Chemicals/pesticides	59	0	0	20
Custom hire:				
DHIA	1,150	1,347	1,864	1,457
Fertilizers & lime	5,037	1,032	5,316	3,988
Feed - purchased grain & other	65,305	61,035	98,416	75,315
Feed - purchased forage	8,403	2,955	6,205	6,112
Fuel and Oil	11,484	6,784	10,061	9,519
Insurance	4,984	4,110	5,052	4,733
Interest	11,992	4,794	7,100	8,052
Labor	25,911	17,781	39,283	27,940
Milk Marketing	4,355	3,400	6,928	4,937
Real estate taxes (farm portion)	2,795	3,009	4,890	3,581
Rent	1,502	1,801	6,426	3,284
Repairs	19,371	7,848	22,405	16,790
Seed and plants	3,940	165	1,341	1,862
Supplies	15,734	9,622	19,182	14,995
Utilities	9,324	7,227	11,470	9,401
Vet	2,527	2,227	3,754	2,853
Miscellaneous	3,622	3,072	4,945	3,903
Total Cash Expenses (f)	\$215,801	\$149,137	\$281,321	\$217,313
Accrual Expense Adjustments				
Depreciation	21,650	20,047	37,894	26,715
Accounts payable	(15,503)	(1,552)	(1,708)	(6,389)
Pre-paid expenses	58	1,400	1,131	848
Supplies	(\$123)	(\$54)	(\$317)	(\$167)
Total Accrual Expenses (g)	\$6,082	\$19,841	\$37,000	\$21,007
Total Farm Expenses (h)	\$221,883	\$168,978	\$318,321	\$238,320
Cash Income from Milk (a-f)	\$2,729	\$43,649	\$86,607	\$44,348
Accrual Income from milk (a+g-h)	(\$3,919)	\$26,278	\$53,352	\$25,207
Milk Income over Feed Costs	\$144,823	\$128,797	\$263,307	\$180,409
Net Cash Farm Income (b-f)	\$29,590	\$61,790	\$127,075	\$73,133
Net Farm Revenue (e-h)	\$8,087	\$47,873	\$86,873	\$47,603
Family Living (i)	\$37,000	\$37,000	\$37,000	\$37,000
Net Cash Farm Earnings (b-f-i)	(\$7,410)	\$24,790	\$90,075	\$36,133
Net Farm Earnings (e-h-i)	(\$28,913)	\$10,873	\$49,873	\$10,603
Off Farm income (j)	\$11,725	\$16,637	\$12,867	\$13,661
Net Family Cash Earnings (b-f-i+j)	\$4,315	\$41,427	\$102,943	\$49,794
Net Earnings (e-h+i+j)	(\$17,188)	\$27,511	\$62,740	\$24,264
Average Assets	\$971,107	\$726,341	\$1,084,621	\$933,100
Average Equity	\$711,112	\$595,961	\$900,879	\$739,985
Return on Assets	-1.95%	2.43%	5.39%	1.94%
Return on Equity	-4.61%	1.91%	5.98%	1.07%
Debt/Asset Ratio	29.29%	19.31%	18.06%	22.31%

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Organic dairy cow herd near Lake Champlain

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The News Update Credo

The Northeast Pasture Consortium News Update is published semi-annually, a late summer-fall issue and winter issue. The goal of these news updates is to keep our Consortium members abreast of the latest research and technology that most impact pasture-based farmers, inform them about the upcoming annual conference, and provide a forum to guide and formulate good policies and best management practices that keep pasture-based farms profitable, efficient, and environmentally sound.

Pasture Systems and Watershed Management Research Unit

