Good afternoon and thanks for joining us I am Judy Simpson. The growing demand for local food means more of our foods been groaned naturally. For livestock producers that means raising animals on pasture which translates to healthier animals and a strong bottom line. For consumers it means better tasting food raised within the community instead of across the country. The pastor program at the University of Vermont center for sustainable agriculture provides educational assistance to farmers in a number of ways including an annual grazing and livestock conference. For more on that here is across the fence’s Rebecca Gollin.

Although ‘grazing’ is in the name, the Vermont grazing and livestock conference is about MUCH MORE than just grass. Workshops range from forage, production, and marketing to processing animals, and managing land.

Jenn Colby, UVM Extension – “The conference workshops aren’t really just limited to how to best use grass, but also we have branched out to meat issues, and dairy issues in the past, marketing, how to have a well run business, you know there’s a lot of husbandry issues... small ruminant parasites are always, you know an issue of interest and concern. There’s a lot of production questions and challenges and we’ve really try to mix it up every year.”

Nats, workshops re: water quality

Workshop presenters include local farmers, researchers and professors from the University of Vermont, among others. Although some of the workshops ARE geared towards farmers, many, like this talk on water quality have a far wider audience.

Colby – “We have a number of people who come every year who are land owners, they want to better understand some of the issues of farmers, we have folks who come every year who are w conservation districts, or they are professionals who work w farmers, we have regional planners who come.”

Kevin Kaija, USDA – “One of the charges I have is to help livestock owners grow efficiently and transition some of their land into the grazing scene.”

Kevin Kaija is an agronomist with the USDA. He helps farmers and landowners set up and manage grazing systems.

Kaija – “I've grown up in Vermont, I've seen a lot of changes from small dairies, many of which were grass based, and the concentration of livestock into larger units, because of the economies of, you know economies of scale are going to work better. And now we're finding that the health of the landscape as well as the health of the people probably will benefit a lot more if we take a closer look at smaller integrated farm systems.”

Nats, hay demo
Kaija - “I see actually no pun intended, a grassroots movement to take advantage of solar radiation through the use of plants, and many of our people here and participants see that opportunity to make Vermont one of the lead areas in this movement.”

Nats, keynote

Offerings such as a day-long pre-conference workshop with a master butcher, keynote speeches by well known figures, and a kids-conference for the younger members of farming families, round out the schedule. Colby says the conference also gives farmers the rare opportunity to spend time with other farmers.

Colby – “Its very difficult to get farmers off of the farm, it's a well-known challenge!”

Once they do get off the farm, they tend to learn a LOT from each other.

Colby – “The farmers that we work with seem to very highly respond to farmer to farmer experiences, sharing the experience and the education provided to them by their peers, which is very much in adult education model, and to provide a situation where farmers can describe what worked for them and did not work for them.”

An on-site tradeshow gives local organizations and Vermont companies a chance to share information about their services, as well as remain connected with the farming world.

Jared Carter, Executive Director, Rural Vermont – “If Vermont farmers succeed, Vermont succeeds.”

Jared Carter is the executive director of Rural Vermont, and spends much of his time in the statehouse.

Jared carter - “Its just a great way to get to know folks to learn, sort of the cutting edge of a lot of these things from like the substantive stuff that I think u learn at the workshops to being able to convosate with… all these great organizations and people that are really innovators in the field, keeps us connected and helps us move our mission forward.”

Bringing together the farmers and care-takers of the land, the Vermont grazing and livestock conference is all about grass… and so much more. In Fairlee, I’m bg with atf…

Vermont Grazing and Livestock Conference will be held on January 20 and 21st at the Lake Morey Inn in Fairlee. For more information about the conference call (802)-656-5459 or by going online to the website we’ve listed on the screen. And we’re going to highlight this information again at the end of the program.

But right now I want to introduce two guest both of whom will be presenting at the upcoming conference. Jen Colby’s from UVM center for sustainable agriculture she is also the grazing conference coordinator. And Sid Bosworth is an agronomist in UVM supplant and soil science department. Welcomed the growth of you. Jen what will you be coming in the upcoming conference?

Jenn.: The irony is I've been the conference coordinator for six years and this is the first time that I will have the opportunity to present my own research based on a two year research project around grass based livestock farmers in Vermont. I have a lot of really interesting data to share with the farmers about themselves and their peers.

Judy.: What about you what will you be presenting?

Sid.: This year and I've presented in the past oftentimes Jenn and I will talk over topics that farmers have expressed interest in. This year my primary topic his weed ecology and weed management. The particular workshop will be myself and one of our sheep producers Kimberly Hagen has been experimenting with using her animals to actually managed some of her problem weeds. That'll be fun and Libya fund session to have.

Judy.: Is that what it's all about? We talked on the videotape about farmer to farmer but sharing experiences and learning about different ideas and ways to use this information from people who actually been doing it.

Sid.: Absolutely. One thing I enjoy it is the workshops are broken the very concurrent so folks coming to the conference can pick and choose topics that maybe they're having an issue with or that they're interested in. Even though it's a large conference with 3 to 400 people a workshop might be anywhere
from 20 to 40 people so you have an opportunity to get discussion going. I learn as much from the farmers might come to my workshop than they certainly learn from me.

Judy.: Other in a big topics as far as important topics that people are interested in this particular year as opposed to other years?

Jenn.: This particular year were continuing a scene that's been running for the last couple years which is included meat processing and the butchering and understanding the issues. That's become something in Vermont that's a priority issue to help grow the meat industry. Last year we did a Daylong workshop cutting of beef cow and this year we use in the same wonderful master butcher that everyone loved last year who's going to be working on a pig and a sheep this year. The issues come up and also Sid is going to be also covering the topic the UVM overgrazing and what is overgrazing and what is a healthy pasture plan. That's something that's come out of the research that I did that we generated a workshop session around this research finding that people were reporting they're actually grazing at a lower height plants height that we would recommend in the course of our regular work. We're not sure if they understand what is very short grazing and what is taller grazing. Its generating a great opportunity to create a discussion around it.

Judy.: Because that has an impact on the health of the pasture.

Jenn.: Absolutely and compaction and water holding capacity.

Sid.: And performance of animals.

Judy.: Tell us about your keynote speaker because it's pretty big news.

Jenn.: We're so excited. Our keynote speaker this year is Dr. Temple Grandin who is known throughout the livestock community as the person who has designed humane handling facilities for over half the animals that are produced every year currently. Well known for redesigning McDonald's hill and facilities and many of the large stockyard facilities and she's also known as an autistic person and her autism audience. We asked for to come to the keynotes then she's also going to be doing a separate session after lunch as well and we asked her to do a general audience session focused more on autism for the evening. We're actually selling separate tickets for that knowing that parents and families may want to be coming just an evening session. It's very exciting she's so well known and HBO even made a movie of her life. She's one of those people that is a household name in many households.

Judy.: She's done a lot of groundbreaking research just on how to handle animals and their psychology which is really important to a lot of farmers especially small Vermont farmers when you raise your animals you want to make sure from start to finish their humanely treated.

Jenn.: Yes. Absolutely and we've really discovered that on the farm animals can be handled very well but making that transition to the processing facility can be a real challenge not only getting annals on the truck but getting them off the truck and moved through the facility. All of the state facilities in Vermont now have humane handling plans that were developed by one of Temple's students. It's again very exciting and very relevant for Vermont as well.

Judy.: What else are you covering this year the conference?

Jenn.: We have several other really exciting speakers that we're bringing in. With Jason Rooftree was from Michigan State university who is a beef specialists. He's doing several different beef sessions and one is on the cost of local marketing and local beef ball with numbers for Michigan to see how to compare to Vermont. And we also have Steve Mohler who's a swine specialist from Ohio State. We have these wonderful local speakers and we also tried to mix it up with some outside information and outside
personalities. As soon as you go outside the state you become an expert so they know that. I think it adds a little excitement to bring in a new phase and some of the information to be able to show that too.

Judy.: What you want attendees to take away from the conference?

Sid.: Whenever I'm talking to a farmer. I just had a call yesterday it was amazing call was some question about wining but while we were speaking I mentioned the conference I said are you coming? And I always say think about what you need right now and bring that question with you. That's one thing nice about this conference you can really identify either a person and doesn't have to be an expert and might be another farmer that's had this experience. There is this opportunity for information exchange and brainstorming and ideas. That's what I encourage people to come with what they really searching out because there's a lot of opportunities to get that.

Jenn.: Have to tell you that he called me right after you talk to you so I sent some information about the conference. It worked.

Judy.: The conference is just one of the educational programs that the pasture network center for sustainable agriculture offer throughout the year. What else to do for farmers and with farmers?

Jenn.: We provide direct technical assistance we go visit farmers on their farms and do a lot of phone and e-mail work just connecting people to various resources to answer their questions. We also run a pretty extensive series of pasture walks and workshops that are out in the field on farms. We tend to do that not just ourselves only 10 to do that in partnership with NOFA Vermont and other parts of extension and tried to increase the number and increasing interest and also increase the resources for the farmer. We usually do 10 to 15 over the course of the summer season.

Judy.: What you hear back from farmers after you've talked to them or they've had questions or have gotten help from you folks.

Sid.: sometimes it creates another workshop. Last year I had calls from folks that had come but wanted more information and it became apparent that these were beginner folks who had moved got some land they want to do something so actually stimulated the workshop that one of our other speakers Dan Hudson extension Agronomist up in saint Johnsbury. He and I put on a beginner workshop one day in April. Sometimes it stimulates more field meetings or workshops. Certainly get more questions afterwards.

Judy.: It sounds like this is an issue that a lot of different kinds of people are interested in as far as their land or animals saving money making more money. Or will set a time so final reminder that the 16th annual Vermont grazing and livestock conference is going to be held January 20 and 21st at the Lake Morey Inn. For more information you can call (802)-656-5459 or you can check out the website that's listed on your screen. Oh to think you both for joining me today. That's our program for today I'm Judy Simpson will see you again next time on across the fence.

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