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## A Keep for Sheep (and other animals too)

by Kimberly Hagen

Not all pastures are created equal, and it is the dilemma of the farmer that practices rotational grazing, to provide water and some shade or shelter in each paddock where the animals are confined. In an effort to deal with this issue, Lisa Ransom, and her husband Scott Baughman of Moretown, owners of the Dancing Wind Farm and Grow Compost business, and the recipients of a \$500 mini-grant from the Vermont Grass Farmers Association, designed and built a multi-level pagoda that sits in the center of their divided pasture. At any time, their sheep, goats and poultry have access to the pagoda from the paddock they are grazing, yet the remaining paddocks can be closed off.

It is an interesting (and exquisite!) design with a distinctly Japanese style of a curved, extended roof and cupola. A plank leads up from the ground to boards laid across the rafters, and it is here where the chickens and ducks can hang out and gaze down on the sheep below. It serves the need and purpose of a shelter for multi species, in multi places all at once, for the cost of one structure.



The Pasture Pagoda in use at Dancing Wind Farm

Should they decide they do want to move it, the pagoda has wheels attached to a pair of the posts - and with tow rope and small tractor, one can move the pagoda to another venue.

While it's true that most animals can survive without a shelter, it's also true that if there is one provided, the animals will use it. And as any good farmer knows, the less stress an animal has, the healthier it is. Summer is particularly problematic. On any given hot summer day, you will

find animals left in the hot sun without shelter, will be huddled around a water bucket, or set themselves up in a circle, with heads in the center and lowered to the ground, trying to create a bit of shade.


Some farmers have built small structures that they place in each of the paddocks where animals are confined. This can be an expensive option if there is a need for several, although for some it is still the only option.

Lisa says they are looking forward to trying out their system this spring. "In theory it seems like it should work very well, but you never know until you get it going. I'm sure we'll need some refinements." It looks like an ideal set up for the small diversified farm such as Dancing Wind Farm with three children, eight Romney sheep, two Angora goats, 26 chickens, and at last count - two ducks. We'll stay tuned to hear about any changes!

The Vermont Grass Farmers Association awards two to four mini grants a year ranging from \$500 to \$1000 per farm. These grants are given to farmers for small research projects, or innovative ideas that can be used by all farmers. For more information visit [www.uvm.edu](http://www.uvm.edu).



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## USDA Issues Final Rule on Organic Access to Pasture

(from the USDA Ag Marketing Service)

WASHINGTON, Feb. 12, 2010 - The U.S. Department of Agriculture announced details of the final regulation regarding access to pasture for organic livestock operations. This rule amends the National Organic Program (NOP) regulations to clarify the use of pasture in raising organic ruminants.

USDA received a substantial number of comments on provisions of the rule affecting finish feeding practices of slaughter livestock, and has extended the comment period for this provision for 60 days. Finish feeding is commonly used by organic farmers and ranchers to improve the grade of beef and involves feeding livestock grain.

Copies of the final pasture rule and additional information are on display on line at <http://www.ams.usda.gov/NOP>.

Comments on the exceptions for finish feeding of ruminant slaughter stock may be submitted before April 19, 2010. This 60-day comment period pertains to the finish feeding provisions only. The specific questions to consider and instructions for submitting comments are available on the NOP website at <http://www.ams.usda.gov/NOP>.

