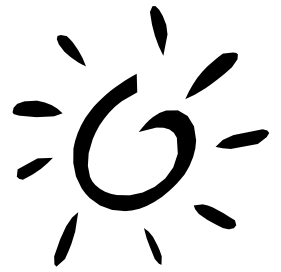


THE SOLAR DOLLAR

Newsletter of the Vermont Grass Farmers' Association

Spring 2011



The Vermont Grass Farmers' Association is dedicated to enhancing the Vermont way of life and its working pastoral landscape by supporting farms and rural communities as they work towards increased economic, social, and environmental sustainability through ecological management of Vermont's unique grassland resource.

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December, 2010 summit to introduce the Working Landscapes Partnership

Farmer Survey Coming Soon to Your Mailbox—Please Respond!

Watch your mailboxes: the 2011 grass-based farmer survey will be arriving the first week of April. On behalf of the UVM Center for Sustainable Agriculture and the Vermont Grass Farmers Association, you are invited to take part in a research study measuring the success and quality of life contributions of grass-based farming to Vermont. We are asking for your partnership and participation to complete the mailed survey. A free gift is enclosed in each envelope.

Background: Vermont's legislators, policymakers and technical assistance providers need our help in order to help us. For over 15 years, state, regional and federal partners have spent millions of dollars on support of grazing technical assistance and outreach. As the visibility of grass-based livestock agriculture increases, there are more positive stories every day about the importance of grazing to Vermont's working landscape and agricultural future. The challenge is that we need to step beyond the stories to give them real numbers. Numbers have a profound effect on policymakers. In this era of budget cutting and reevaluating priorities, it is our responsibility to stand up and be counted, so the value of grazing to our state's business economy, our communities and our natural environment is measured.

Partners NOFA, VT Beef Producers and VT Sheep and Goat have shared their mailing lists as well as our pasture list in order to reach a larger group. Thank you in advance for your participation!



Join New Partnership to Keep VT's Working Landscape Vital

Vermont's working landscape—its open meadows and mixed forests—offers economic, cultural, scenic, environmental and recreational benefits that are essential to our future prosperity. Yet if alarming trends are not reversed, it could vanish within a generation along with Vermont's unique character and many key values that unify the state.

The new nonpartisan and broad-based Vermont Working Landscape Partnership is leading a bold year-long campaign to keep our farm and forest economy vital. It will bring a focused Action Plan to the Governor and legislature—one that will help everyone trying to make a living from the land. Vermont Council on Rural Development is already endorsing this effort and welcomes this new voice in the State House.

It's important to show our elected leaders how much Vermonters care about this issue. Sign up as an individual member of the Partnership to stay updated and help shape the campaign for the future of Vermont's Working Landscape. Many organizations and individuals have already joined this Partnership in support of its Plan. Learn more and add your name to the growing list. The Vermont Council on Rural Development is leading this effort.

Learn more at www.vtrural.org.

Should VGFA sign on to the partnership as an organization? Please tell us!





VGFA President Kimberly Hagen has set her sights on education about the importance of grass-based farming as the priority for 2011 and the rest of the board heartily agreed as a recent meeting held at Shelburne Farms.

Educational efforts will focus on three main areas:

- 1) farmer education (including board members, more info in box below),
- 2) policymaker education, and
- 3) public education.

How will we accomplish education in these areas? We have a plan, but we need your help:

Farmer education: Whether you are an experienced or a beginning grass-based livestock farmer, get out to a pasture walk or workshop this year. The full schedule isn't set yet, but we are already planning workshops on teaching your livestock to eat weeds, finishing your livestock on grass, grass farming principles for beginning farmers, understanding cut sheets, building a grass-based business and much more. We'll do our part to organize and advertise a great collection of timely, useful pasture events. Your job is to come learn!

Policymaker education: New Vermont Secretary of Agriculture Chuck Ross has already indicated an interest in supporting grass-based farming, but a need to learn more about the specifics and the opportunity. Board members and staff are gathering information to share with Chuck and with members of the federal delegation to educate them about the importance of supporting grass-based systems for the future of Vermont's working landscape and quality of life, as well as offering them concrete suggestions to help support grass-based farmers in the future. The survey announced on page 1 will be very important to educating our policymakers: do your part and please complete and return it!

We are also pleased that VGFA continues to have representation on the State Technical Committee (STC), which can have direct impact how NRCS contracts are implemented in Vermont. If you have comments to share with the STC, contact us and we will pass them on.

Public education: We can't stop at farmers and policymakers--the public needs to better understand how grass-based farming works and why everyone needs to support it. Every person who looks out on the Vermont landscape and values its openness, clean environment and local food

ethic needs to understand the contribution our grass-based farms make to that landscape. Board and staff will do our best to education the public but we need help from our members and supporters for this project, too.

One great way to learn how to educate the public (because we are all eaters!) is to join The Grass Whisperer, Troy Bishopp, New York grass-based beef farmers and local Toastmaster's chapter President in a working session on "Communicating Your Passion for Grass-Based Farming to the Media". Troy is excellent at using his experience and passion--and his story--to reach written, web and in-person audiences as well as make compelling arguments to his state and federal lawmakers. You have a story to tell, and the public needs to hear it! Join us **Sunday, April 3 from 2 to 4 p.m.** in Randolph to practice your communication skills in a welcoming group of your peers.

More ideas are welcome. If 2011 is the Year of VGFA Education, we need everyone to take part!

If you want to learn more about our educational efforts, take part, or contribute your own ideas and energy, contact us. Any person can talk with you about any topic, but here are the focus areas:

Any topic:

Jenn Colby	jcolby@uvm.edu
Rachel Gilker	rgilker@uvm.edu

Farmer education:

Charlie Taplin	charlie@floatingbridgeorganics.com
Willie Gibson	williegibson@charter.net
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John Pollard	bramacharyal@gmail.com

Policymaker education:

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Laura Olsen	olsenvt@gmail.com
Eric Noel	ericnoel@hotmail.com

Public/Consumer education:

Abbey Willard	abbey_willard@yahoo.com
Sam Smith	ssmith@shelburnefarms.org



Getting a jump start on farmer (board) education:
Kimberly Hagen, Eric Noel and Jenn Colby attended a two-day workshop on high density and planned grazing taught by MO grazier Greg Judy at the PASA conference in February. We learned a lot and are ready to start sharing these concepts with farmers throughout VT this year. Eric has already been practicing this method for 6 years with great results and Kimberly and Jenn will be starting on their farms this year. We promise to take (and share) lots of pictures.



VT GRASS FARMERS ASSOCIATION
2011 MEMBER INNOVATION MINI-GRANT

Closing date: May 2, 2011 (postmarked)

The VGFA would like to encourage and support innovative practices to increase the sustainability and vitality of grass-based farming in our region. We are soliciting proposals from members interested in trying new practices to increase profitability, reduce environmental degradation, or test new techniques.

Possible ideas include but are not limited to:

- extension of the grazing season,
- innovative grazing practices or infrastructure,
- new forage varieties or cropping systems,
- evaluation of new or competing products, etc.

Project Requirements

A committee will rank proposals on the following criteria:

- Innovation - the project will bring new ideas to the VGFA community
 - General feasibility - the practices will be replicable on other farms
 - Measurable outcome - results will be assessed and interpreted
- Accessibility & documentation- results will be presented to VGFA membership. Possibilities include: pasture walks, posters at the Annual VT Grazing & Livestock Conference, photos or newsletter reports

Send completed application to: VGFA, PO Box 142, Randolph Center VT 05061

Questions?

Rachel Gilker 802-656-3834 rgilker@uvm.edu
Or Kimberly Hagen 802-229-4096 khagen@sover.net

Project Title: _____
(What do you want to call your proposed project?)

Amount Requested: _____
(up to \$1000 per project)

Applicant: _____

Farm Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Your Farm Operations: (livestock types and numbers, acres grazed, etc.)

Project Summary: (What would you like to try? Attach a diagram, map or photo, if appropriate.)

Assessment: (How will results be measured and evaluated?)

Timeline: (When, approximately, will major project activities occur? No more than 2 years duration.)

Budget: (What will the mini-grant fund? No more than ½ toward management time.)

Information sharing: (How will results be reported to the VGFA membership? How will they be documented?)

 2011 VGFA Annual Meeting

VGFA's annual meeting took place January 27 at the Barre Farm Show. Joining the board members were several representatives from USDA NRCS and the National Ag Statistics Service, as well as Vermont's new Secretary of Agriculture, Chuck Ross. The meeting with Secretary Ross went well and the VGFA board was encouraged to develop a list of topics of interest to grass-based farmers in an effort to bring the new Secretary up to speed. This conversation sparked the VGFA plan to make education at all levels a priority for 2011 (see page 2 for more information).

In addition to hosting the Secretary, VGFA held new board member elections. New board members starting three-year terms include Lydia Petty, Eric Noel and Abbey Willard. We would like to recognize and say thank you to departing board members Leo Larocque and Sosten Lungu. Beverly Rutter was officially recognized as Honorary Dairy Farmer Ombudsman and advisor (she is the VGFA bookkeeper, and is unable to be elected to the board as a voting member, but Beverly attends most meetings and is an invaluable contributor to our conversations).

Board officers for 2011 are:

Kimberly Hagen, President
Willie Gibson, Vice President
Andrea Morgan, Secretary
Sam Smith, Treasurer



 2011 Grazing Conference: Starting Point for Educational Efforts

The 2011 VT Grazing & Livestock Conference was a terrific success in many respects, but possibly most important was jump starting VGFA's partnerships and education agenda for 2011. From the pre-conference workshops on Friday through Saturday's conversations and into the rest of the year, 2011 promises to be full of excitement and learning.

The pre-conference workshop taking place Friday January 21 was well attended and, for many, the highlight of the entire conference. Master butcher Cole Ward, named "one of America's top 50 butchers" by author Marissa Guggiana, and Virginia processing plant owner Joe Cloud broke down a side of grass-fed beef into primal cuts and then individual cuts in front of a full house. Cooking suggestions and cutting options [for discussion when working with processing facilities] were talked about in depth. Attendees remarked that they learned an astounding amount of new information from Cole. Also participating in the conversation later in the day were a panel of chefs and foodies. The audience,


panel and butchers talked back and forth about increasing wholesale distribution, pricing, serving the needs of different marketing audiences and more. At the end of the day, participants listened to Randy Quenneville of the VT Agency of Agriculture outline meat regulations and asked questions of a meat processing panel, representing six processing plants. Ten policymakers, including four members of the House Agriculture Committee came to learn more about the issues surrounding livestock slaughter and processing.

The pre-conference processing theme has sparked a number of ongoing conversations and educational activities. Pasture Program staff have been participating on a Meat Advisory Panel with the Ag Agency, processors and wholesale partners to increase understanding of meat-related issues and improve producer-processor relationships. Planned for this year are four workshops focused on beef issues, but of use to many livestock farmers, including issues such as: understanding cut sheets, working with processors, producing consistent grass-based product through out the whole year, finishing animals properly, and building a regional market. The VT Beef Producers will be holding one of these workshops in conjunction with their annual Summer Social, so expect a fun taste taste and burger grilling event.

Based on the positive feedback from this workshop, we have already secured Cole Ward's commitment to cut up a pig for next year's pre-conference workshop. Our keynote speaker is already locked in: Dr. Temple Grandin.

So, hold the dates now! January 20 & 21, 2012.



 2011 Northeast Pasture Consortium Report

Several board members and Pasture Program staff Rachel Gilker and Jenn Colby traveled to State College, PA in February to participate in the annual Northeast Pasture Consortium meeting. This research consortium provides an opportunity to learn about ongoing pasture-related research and reflect back to the researchers future research needs as seen by the farming community. Results shared with the group included data on how climate change may affect the northeast grazing season, the effects of supplementing with molasses, and control of internal parasites in small ruminants. An evening session included presentations about technical assistance providers through grazing organizations through out the Northeastern states.

For more information about the individual presentations, visit: www.umaine.edu/grazingguide.





CONTACT US

For information on any of the items in this newsletter, or for questions about the Vermont Grass Farmers Association, or pasture management, please contact the Center for Sustainable Agriculture Pasture Program staff:

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Colchester, VT 05446

Fax: (802) 656-8874

Join the VPN listserv at

www.uvm.edu/pasture

We are on Facebook at

VT Grass Farmers Association

About the Vermont Grass Farmers Association & Vermont Pasture Network

The Vermont Grass Farmers Association is a group of farmers and neighbors growing the vitality of grass-based farming in Vermont.

The Vermont Pasture Network is a cooperative working agreement among the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the University of Vermont Center for Sustainable Agriculture's Pasture Program, UVM Extension, and the Vermont Grass Farmers' Association (VGFA).

Funding comes from VGFA member dues and from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI). The VGFA is the Vermont farmer representative coalition to the GLCI, and acts as an advisory board for the work of the Vermont Pasture Network.

VGFA membership dues are \$40 per calendar year, and include a conference discount, listing in the Directory of Grass-Fed Products, quarterly Solar Dollar newsletter, and additional member benefits.



VT Grass Farmers Association
P. O. Box 142
Randolph Center, VT 05061



2011 Mini grant deadline May 2!