

Over \$1 million federal and state dollars have supported grazing outreach and technical assistance over the past 20 years without formal evaluation of the impact. This research project will utilize historical and contemporary data to examine and evaluate the socio-economic and environmental impacts of grass-based livestock farming in Vermont. Properly-managed grass-based livestock farms have been shown to have beneficial environmental impacts through carbon sequestration, soil retention, improved water quality, and reduced use of animal hormones or antibiotics, as compared to confinement animal agriculture. Environmental benefits of rotational grazing are well documented; however, the economic viability and social impacts have been reported only anecdotally. Vermont livestock farmers have used intensively-rotated grazing management systems for over 20 years without without formal evaluation of trend data concerning this target population.

Historical data has been archived from participant evaluations distributed at pasture workshops and conferences; demographic/management information from the *Directory of Grass-Fed Products*; and Vermont Grass Farmers Association membership and NOFA-VT certification lists. Contemporary data will be collected through pasture events, interviews, mailed survey and consumer polling. Data collected will include intensity of, and acreage under, rotational grazing management, livestock information, farmer demographics, quality of life indicators, and sales/marketing venues.

Goals:

- Evaluate the environmental significance of grass based livestock farms in Vermont from the view of agriculture and conservation professionals
- Examine and describe the economic impacts of grass-based livestock farms in Vermont through wholesale and retail sales, evaluation of marketing methods and product distinction.
- Examine the impact of grass based livestock systems on the social values of farmers and consumers in such areas as community interaction, tourism and marketing, farmer-to-farmer cooperation and knowledge sharing, sense of place, and [farm] family quality of life.
- Evaluate the significance of grass-based livestock farmers' evolution over study period, as well as assess future implications.