

# Wisconsin Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative Strategic Plan 2011-2016



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Strategic Plan 2011-2016*

## Strategic Plan

*This five-year strategic plan guides our efforts to provide high quality technical assistance, education, and research. This plan highlights our initiative to expand the use of well-managed grazing-based livestock production in Wisconsin. It includes six long term goals, under which we have defined short-term goals, tactics or actions to achieve those goals, and measures to document outcomes.*



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## Steering Committee Composition and Staff

The Wisconsin GLCI steering committee is composed of representatives of farmer and conservation organizations active in the state. Current membership includes:

- Two at-large members: Mary C. Anderson, Chair; and Paul Onan, Past Chair
- Randy Cutler, Vice Chair representing the Wisconsin Sheep Breeders Association
- Wayne Craig, Dave Johnson and Kevin Mahalko representing GrassWorks
- Gerald Jaeger representing the Wisconsin Farmers Union
- Dick Hauser representing the Wisconsin Cattlemen's Association
- Cheri Kluessendorf representing the Wisconsin Farm Bureau
- James Alber representing the Wisconsin Land and Water Conservation Association
- Don Bina and James Costello representing the State Association of Resource Conservation and Development Councils

The steering committee is advised by:

- Rhonda Gildersleeve, UW Extension
- Dick Cates, UW Madison College of Agriculture and Life Sciences
- Geoffrey Brink, USDA - Agricultural Research Service
- Brian Pillsbury\* and Pat Murphy, USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Laura Paine, WI Department of Agriculture Trade and Consumer Protection
- Paul Daigle, Wisconsin Association of Land Conservation Employees
- WI Department of Natural Resources

\*Brian Pillsbury serves as Executive Secretary for the organization





## Background, History, and Current Situation

Established in 1991, the Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI) is a nationwide consortium of individuals and organizations working together to maintain and improve the management and the health of the nation's grazing lands, mostly private but also public. The Initiative is driven by agricultural producer needs, scientific research, and environmental stewardship for the benefit of America's grazing lands resource.

GLCI is carried out through coalitions of individuals and organizations functioning at the local, state, regional and national levels. GLCI seeks to implement its activities through these local, state and national partnerships. It informs the public of the contributions that well-managed grazing lands make to the quality of life of every citizen. GLCI is founded on the principles of voluntary action by those who own and/or manage grazing lands, and a respect for private property rights. GLCI emphasizes high quality, voluntary technical assistance, expanded grazing lands research and education, and a more knowledgeable and informed public.

Wisconsin's GLCI Steering Committee was formed in 1996. In 1999, through dedicated work by farmer members, the Committee secured federal funds for a competitive grant program to support grazing networks and trained grazing specialists to provide technical assistance and education for Wisconsin farmers throughout the state. In recent years, these funds have amounted to \$700,000 to \$800,000 in support for grazing. In 2008, the organization secured an additional \$400,000 in state funds to complement the federal funding. The program has supported approximately 30 projects per year since 2004, when DATCP became the administrator of the program. Despite the recent economic downturn and on-going financial constraints, this plan seeks to build on our successes and chart a path forward. Now, more than ever, managed grazing remains an economically, environmentally, and socially sound practice for Wisconsin farmers.

## Vision for Wisconsin Grazing

***Wisconsin agriculture contributes \$59 billion to the state's economy. Our 36,000+ livestock farms represent a major agricultural sector. We believe that well-managed pasture is key to the long term sustainability of Wisconsin's agricultural economy, environment and livestock farming community.***

### *Economics*

Well-managed pasture is an effective tool for reducing cost of production and keeping livestock and dairy farms profitable. Well-managed, pasture-based dairy farms have consistently out-performed traditional confinement and large herd confinement farms on a per-cow and a per-cwt basis (Kriegl). Nearly half of beginning dairy farmers are getting their start by using managed grazing. This is important because the average age of farmers in Wisconsin is 55. With many farmers retiring, the reduced capital investment and cost of production makes managed grazing an ideal entry model for beginning livestock farmers. Managed grazing provides smart short-term financial stability and helps create a long-term viable investment.

### *Environment*

Distribution of livestock farms across Wisconsin's landscape provides significant environmental benefits to the state. Many of our annual row crops are grown to provide feed to livestock including: corn, corn silage, and soybeans. This contributes greatly to sediment and nutrient runoff into the waters of the state. Many of these annual crops, especially those grown on highly erodible land would benefit by the inclusion of perennial pastures and hay in crop rotations, making it more possible for farmers to meet and exceed environmental standards. There are many acres of farmland not suitable for annual crops that could be pastured successfully. In addition, these acres of perennial forages will provide high quality habitat for ground nesting birds and other grassland dependent species. These benefits can be achieved while growing Wisconsin's livestock industry and increasing Wisconsin's meat, milk, and fiber production.

### *Rural Communities*

On average, each dairy cow in Wisconsin represents about \$17,000 in economic activity in the community where the farm is located (Deller and Williams). The concentration of milk production among fewer, larger farms limits the impact of this activity to fewer communities. This effect is compounded by the fact that larger farms are more likely to purchase inputs in large quantities from out of state, while smaller farms tend to make more purchases in their local communities (Foltz et al.).

Small scale dairy and meat processing plants are also a good source of jobs and economic activity for rural communities. Larger numbers of small and moderate-sized dairy and livestock farms in close proximity to small processors can support the continued economic viability of Wisconsin's rural communities and agricultural infrastructure.





## Mission Statement - Wisconsin Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative

*To expand the use of grazing-based livestock production systems that are profitable and foster environmental stewardship. This will be accomplished through high quality technical assistance to owners and operators of private land; university and producer-coordinated education; and research programs, all on a voluntary basis.*

### *Long Term Goals*

1. Expand the Use of Managed Grazing in Wisconsin
2. Foster Consumer and Public Support for Managed Grazing
3. Work Together More Effectively
4. Keep Experienced Graziers Engaged
5. Support Research that Benefits Wisconsin Grazing Farms
6. Support Development of Markets for Grass-fed Products



## Goal 1 ~ Expand the Use of Managed Grazing

Expanding the use of managed grazing in Wisconsin is the primary focus of the GLCI. This involves setting goals for acreages converted to well-managed pasture as well as for numbers of farmers and landowners engaged and trained. This expansion means converting annual crop land to well-managed perennial forages and improving unmanaged permanent pastureland to a higher level of management to benefit both environmental and agronomic performance. We have had significant success achieving this goal by providing both one-on-one technical assistance and high quality group educational opportunities for farmers and landowners.

### Technical Assistance Goals

Our primary goal for technical assistance is to provide professional planning assistance to producers for developing and implementing grazing plans for their properties. Specifically, we seek to meet these goals:

- 10,000 acres of land converted to well-managed pasture annually.
- 50 grazing plans developed with new farmers.
- 100 grazing plans developed with experienced farmers.
- 65% of grazing plans developed will be implemented in the first three years after the plan is completed.

### Tactics and Documentation

We will continue documenting our results primarily through the NRCS reporting system for cost-shared projects, through the GLCI grant program, external sources of data such as DATCP's Land Conservation Department reporting system, and other means.

Tactics and timelines will be developed by the GLCI steering committee.



### Education Goals

Our primary goals are to provide and/or support educational activities that help graziers build skills in managed grazing. Specific tactics include:

Maintaining local grazing networks for educational activities across the state:

- Conduct 60 pasture walks throughout the state.
- 20 local workshops or conferences throughout the state.

Support statewide education for farmers

- 10 events per year (including such activities as the WI Grazing Conference, statewide workshops, University of Wisconsin Extension and technical college grazing schools, a grazing presence at Farm Technology Days, World Dairy Expo, etc.)

Support statewide education for youth.

- Update the make available to vocational agricultural instructors high school grazing curriculum.
- Develop capacity for classroom presentations from grazing farmers utilizing the Speakers Bureau.
- Initiate farm field trips for high school students.
- Increase use of the Grazing Speakers Bureau that is being developed by Dick Cates.
- Develop grazing education packets that can be distributed to high school agriculture classes, FFA groups, through the Farm Bureau's "Ag in the Classroom" program.

### Tactics and Documentation

Progress will be documented using the GLCI Grant reporting process. With assistance from GrassWorks, Extension, DATCP and other agencies, we will compile information on grazing network activities on the Grassworks website. Statewide reports and other educational activities will be available in the DATCP website.

## Goal 2 ~ Foster Consumer and Public Support

The GLCI Steering Committee values the support and partnership of likeminded individuals and organizations. This goal involves reaching out to the conservation community, consumers, and policy makers to involve them in our educational efforts. Our over-arching goal is to develop an organized, consistent, strong voice for the grazing community. This will allow us to be more focused and effective at garnering support. Our voice needs to be a blend of youth - looking to the future of farming, and of experienced individuals sharing their knowledge and expertise.

### Audiences and Short-term Goals

#### Conservation community

- Initiate communication with all Wisconsin Conservation organizations to build support for grazing and develop partnerships based on common goals. We recognize the importance of working with both state level organizations and local conservation organizations.

#### Policy Makers

- Initiate communication with and/or continue working with all local, state and federal policy makers that influence agriculture decisions in Wisconsin.

#### Consumer, public support

- Initiate outreach to inform the public about the benefits of well-managed livestock grazing.
- Form partnerships with other local and sustainable food groups, Co-ops, Local Food groups and farmers markets.
- Develop programs for consumer events, such as pasture walks, brochures, videos, etc.



### Tactics and Documentation

The GLCI Steering committee will summarize this and other organizations' activities in this area each year. Tactics include building partnerships with conservation groups such as Trout Unlimited, Pheasants Forever, Turkey Federation, Wisconsin Waterfowl Association, Ducks Unlimited, The Nature Conservancy, the Aldo Leopold Foundation, the International Crane Foundation, White Tails Unlimited, Audubon Society, etc. and policy makers including the Agriculture Board, the DNR Board, the state Land and Water Conservation Committee, the NRCS State Technical Committee, Federal Senate and House Agriculture Committees, state Senate and Assembly Agriculture Committees, state Joint Finance Committee, WI Organic Advisory Council.

## Goal 3 ~ Work Together More Effectively

This goal involves speaking with one voice within the grazing community and with other agriculture organizations. Grazing community groups include GrassWorks, local grazing networks and other grazing organizations such as the American Grass-fed Association. It also means coordinating with other producer groups, working together on common goals (Professional Dairy Producers of Wisconsin, Midwest Forage Association and others), maintaining and expanding current partnerships, seeking new partners, and striving to make sure the initiative remains producer-driven.

### Short-term Goals

- Increase cooperation within the grazing community.
- Increase grazing visibility (GLCI and GrassWorks) among agricultural community groups.
- Work more closely with GLCI member organizations by establishing a formal communication system/process (e.g. report back to member organizations).
- Partner effectively with other agriculture groups on common goals.

### Tactics and Documentation

This will be a progressive process with tactics including:

- Establish more formal communication with our member organizations through their representatives on the GLCI steering committee.
- Work with and reach out to other Ag groups such as PDPW, WDBA, food marketers, breed associations, input suppliers and related Ag non-profit organizations.
- More effectively market GLCI and its activities to others in agriculture.

We will document our efforts by annually summarizing activities toward this goal, such as increased participation and numbers of contacts with other organizations. we will also report on member organization activities at GLCI meetings.



## Goal 4 ~ Keep Experienced Graziers Engaged

The GLCI steering committee recognizes that this is an important but challenging goal. Experienced graziers are the backbone of grazing in Wisconsin and GLCI is strengthened by their participation in our efforts. We recognize that it is important to maintain the synergy offered by pasture walks that enables information transfer from the experienced graziers to new ones. GLCI will provide resources to keep the experienced graziers interested and challenged.



### Short-term Goals

- Survey experienced graziers to better understand their educational needs and interests.
- Support efforts to provide advanced courses and pasture walks on topics of interest to experienced graziers.
- Support efforts to provide mentoring opportunities to help beginning graziers.
- Foster a lifelong learning concept for all graziers.

### Tactics and Documentation

An important first step is surveying experienced graziers to understand what their needs are. Possible tactics include the following: provide high quality advanced training, support more applied research at the university to increase technical knowledge on grazing management, make consultants available to help fine-tune systems, and establish peer advisor groups and discussion groups. Documentation includes survey results, numbers of events and activities conducted for experienced graziers, evaluation surveys after events to gauge success.

## Goal 5 ~ Support Research that Benefits Wisconsin Grazing Farms.

Research is more than a means of generating new knowledge and addressing challenges in the management of pasture-based farms. The GLCI research grant program has been a way to engage and communicate with the University and other agencies and to raise the profile of managed grazing within mainstream dairy and livestock production. The Blue Sky Greener Pastures project is currently compiling a comprehensive annotated bibliography of grazing research from Wisconsin, the US and other countries. These materials can help us identify research gaps and move forward with research in areas that are needed most.

### Short-term Goals

- Identify and secure funding sources for grazing research in Wisconsin.
- Work with partners to determine what research has been done and what gaps exist.
- Work with partners to establish a means of periodically surveying graziers to identify important topics for research.
- Encourage on-farm research by producers.
- Participate in efforts to engage the University of Wisconsin, USDA ARS Dairy Forage Research Center and other research organizations to identify and conduct research to move grazing forward.
- Work with GrassWorks to extend an invitation to researchers to attend and/or speak at the WI Grazing Conference.

### Tactics and Documentation

Tactics and documentation will be developed by the GLCI steering committee.



## Goal 6 ~ Support Development of Markets for Grass-Fed Products

The market for grass-based dairy and meat is expanding rapidly. While this area is somewhat outside the purview of the GLCI Steering Committee, we are aware that growing demand for grass-based products can have a positive influence on GLCI goals. It is important that we maintain awareness of activities in this area and contribute to its growth if and when it is appropriate.



### Short-term Goals

Recognize and act on opportunities to partner with consumers and consumer groups to promote grass-based products, as appropriate.

- Maintain awareness of state and federal standards regarding grass-fed products.

### Tactics and Documentation

Tactics and documentation will be developed by the GLCI steering committee.

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### Contact Information

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