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It is hard to think about grazing when you are trying to keep warm during this period of cold weather. One's mind tries to think warm but Mother Nature brings us to the reality of the cold grip that is upon us. However, the cold is giving us time to do some of those things indoors that we have put off.

I was thinking about a topic for these ponderings and it dawned on me that in the September 2002 ponderings, I briefly discussed Project Grass but failed to give you the whole story about their expansion in Pennsylvania. In the July 2001 Ponderings I gave you the history of Project Grass. Now I am pleased to bring you the story about their growth from one chapter to five chapters that will soon cover all of Pennsylvania.

Project Grass started in Southwestern Pennsylvania in 1980. Yes, 23 years ago. It was a way of promoting the effective establishment and utilization of grasslands in that region. The concept of Project Grass is the creation of a grazing partnership of producers, industry representatives, and agency personnel.

A local partnership was developed in each county in the project area and representatives from each county serve on the Project Grass Coordinating Committee. An executive committee is elected from the coordinating committee and serves as the board of directors. They operate under a set of by-laws that governs the administrative operation of Project Grass.

Eighteen counties made up the original Project Grass. The Board was approached by several counties outside of the project boundary asking for inclusion into the project area. As a result of this interest, the board decided to take their concept outside of their original area and offer other areas the opportunity to develop regional chapters. Project Grass adopted a goal to "Promote outreach and education to graziers in Pennsylvania by establishing new chapters of Project Grass." This goal has resulted in the inception of four new chapters. This new expansion takes Project Grass to the four corners of Pennsylvania.

The original chapter is now called the Southwest Chapter. The second chapter to be formed was the South Cen-

tral Chapter. The Northwest and the Northeast Chapters formed next. Currently a Southeast Chapter is forming. The first four chapters have a coordinator, a Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) grazing specialist, who performs administrative and technical tasks to accomplish the business and goals of the chapter. Each chapter has drafted and adopted a set of by-laws that provides the policies for the chapter to operate under.

Last issue, I discussed the Pennsylvania Grazing Team of NRCS and where they were located. The individuals that I listed as team members are serving as Project Grass Coordinators, except for the Southeast Chapter. In that case, NRCS is currently planning to hire a person to fill that slot.

The growth of Project Grass from the original chapter to statewide coverage has been a dynamic process. The cooperation and dedication of the coordinating committees has been outstanding. Producers and agency people that have the interest and desire to see a Project Grass chapter have worked long and hard to put all the pieces in place to make it happen.

In November of 2002, the first Statewide Meeting of Project Grass was held in State College. The attendees met to discuss ideas and develop goals and objectives for PA Project Grass. One of the goals set was to develop a

youth outreach program. As part of that program, it was proposed that a Grassland Evaluation Contest be established for FFA and 4-H youth. A Grassland Evaluation Contest committee quickly formed and, as a result, a contest has been organized.

This contest is a terrific opportunity for FFA and 4-H students to learn more about grazing and grasslands, plus earn scholarship funds. Each FFA Chapter or 4-H club can enter a team of three to four students. The team will have to evaluate a typical grazing site on its merits for livestock grazing. The contest will be scored on four sections: 1) Grassland evaluation, 2) Soils, 3) Plant Identification, and 4) Wildlife benefits. The winning team will be presented with a \$500 scholarship for each member. The second place team will be awarded \$250 scholarships for each team member. In addition, a \$500 scholarship will be presented to the highest scoring individual. The first place team will also be provided with the opportunity to go on to the Mid-America Contest to compete for a chance to win the National Contest.

The first state contest will take place May 7 in the State College area. A preliminary training session for interested teams will be conducted March 12 in State College at Hoss's Steak and Seahouse Restaurant from 10:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. You can contact me at the address or telephone

listed at the end of this article for more information or to register for the training session. A study guide will be sent to teams upon receipt of their registration form.

Project Grass has adopted this contest for youth as part of their outreach project. The contest has been put together by many federal and state agencies and organizations. One of those organizations is the Pennsylvania Forage and Grassland Council. Funds are being solicited from many Pennsylvania groups and companies to be used to conduct the contest, as well as for scholarships to the winners.

It is exciting to see all these new events taking place in Pennsylvania. Project Grass is now covering the state and offering technical assistance to producers to develop grazing systems. They are also planning educational programs that will give graziers and interested producers a chance to learn more about grazing. The grassland evaluation contest is also a way to offer educational experience for our youth.


If you would like further information on any of these subjects or any grazing topic, please contact me by e-mail me at [HYPERLINK mailto:duane.pysher@pa.usda.gov](mailto:hyperlink@pa.usda.gov) or write to me at NRCS, One Credit Union Place, Suite 340, Harrisburg, PA, 17110-2993 or telephone me at (717) 237-2221.

Until next time, happy grazing.

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