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22nd International Grassland Congress

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The 22nd International Grassland Congress (Revitalising Grasslands to Sustain Our Communities) took place in Sydney, Australia from September 15 through September 19, 2013.

Proceedings Editors: David L. Michalk, Geoffrey D. Millar, Warwick B. Badgery, and Kim M.

Broadfoot

Publisher: New South Wales Department of Primary Industry, Kite St., Orange New South Wales, Australia

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Master Grazer: Improving grazing management in Kentucky

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Keywords: Education, extension, newsletter, Grazing School, farm demonstration.

Introduction

The Master Grazer Educational Program is the result of funding provided by the Kentucky Agricultural Development Board to educate producers on better utilization of grazing lands to improve livestock production and the profitability of the State. County agriculture and natural resource agents, extension specialists, industry contacts and producers work together to make this program a success. The Master Grazer Educational Program began in 2006 as evening lecture sessions taking place in local extension offices. In 2008, the program grew with the addition of a field session that showcased a farm with successful grazing practices, a farm with underdeveloped grazing practices, and a final session for participants to develop their own grazing system. In 2010, the program was modified into the Applied Master Grazer Program. This program placed more emphasis on the importance of the county agriculture. The agents decided which topics would be covered and administered many areas of the program. The program now consists of a minimum of two evening field sessions in which a farm is showcased for a particular topic, as well as one impact session in which participants can interact and contribute to a producer forum. For the purpose of this article, reporting will be focused on the last two years of the Master Grazer Program. The past few years, events such as Grazing Schools, the Advanced Grazing Schools, and Pasture Walks have been held to discuss timely topics of forage and livestock management. Also, the Master Grazer Program has a newsletter, website, and DVD series.

Grazing Schools

The Kentucky Grazing School is a two day event that includes lecture series, demonstrations and hands-on exercises to better pasture and livestock management. The purpose of this program is to couple forage management with animal production to help producers increase the efficiency and profitability of farms. Topics such as forage management, variety selection, establishment, livestock nutrition, weed control, fertilization, watering systems, rotational grazing, and fencing are discussed. Grazing Schools are held in the spring and the fall, and attract producers, industry professionals, and public service professionals from county and government agencies from many different counties and even other states. When surveyed, all participants indicated that they planned to make changes to their farms or to promote new practices to improve their

grazing systems and increase production and profitability as a result of attending the program. After attending the Grazing School, many producers expressed an interest in attending the Advanced Grazing School as well.

The Advanced Kentucky Grazing School is a one-day course meant for those who have participated in a previous grazing program, and is used as a refresher course to go more in depth on important forage and animal topics. The first Advanced Grazing School was first held on July 10, 2012. Participants representing 4 states and over 30 Kentucky counties attended this event. Many surveyed participants indicated their intentions to make changes to their current forage and livestock operation as a result of the program. Common changes include improvements to water systems, use of summer annuals, stockpiling forages for winter feed, seeding novel endophyte infected tall fescue varieties, and improved techniques for weed control. Gathering at events such as the Advanced Grazing Schools have helped the development of networks of producers, industry professionals and the public sector to share knowledge of improved farm management through efficient grazing techniques.

Grazing Networks

Grazing Networks consist of producers who focus on feeding their livestock mainly through grazing. Through Pasture Walks, the Grazing Network provides a way for these producers to get together and discuss timely management practices to better utilize pastures for animal production. Pasture Walks take place at a host farm, where the farmer highlights timely forage and livestock management issues and an extension specialist provides a basic lecture and facilitates discussion. Active Grazing Networks include the Eden Shale Grazing Network, Northern Kentucky Grazing Network, Western Kentucky Grazing Network, and the Kentucky River Grazing Network. These networks can gain access to other resources and research articles through the Grazing News newsletter and the Master Grazer website.

Resources

Grazing News is issued monthly during the grazing season (February to November) and is distributed either electronically or physically by mail to all Kentucky county agriculture extension agents, producers, and others who have requested the newsletter. Contents include articles on

