

American Forage and Grassland Council technology interaction and policy development

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Brief description The American Forage and Grassland Council (AFGC) is a national organisation which has been in existence since 1968. Membership of AFGC is about 2,500. The membership of AFGC is divided into three main sectors: private, public and industry. The private sector has the largest membership (60%), and private members are usually producers that are engaged in some type of agricultural enterprise involving the use of forages. The public sector members (30%) are educators and other government agency personnel that work with the general public. The industry sector (10%) involves various companies that deal with the forage industry. The AFGC Board of Directors is composed of 18 members, 6 from each sector. Most of the AFGC membership belongs to an affiliate council. There are currently 25 affiliate councils in the United States, most of which are located in the eastern, southern and midwestern regions of the country. There is one affiliate council located in Canada (Ontario). One of the major strengths of AFGC lies in its diversity of membership among the three sectors. The primary core purpose of AFGC is to advance forage agriculture and grassland stewardship. This organisation has the vision to be recognised as the leader and voice of economically and environmentally sound forage agriculture.

Actions to improve technology interaction The development of an AFGC website (www.afgc.org) in 2000 has provided a good means of communication among AFGC members and headquarters. Information on this site includes forage production information, links to other forage societies and general AFGC information. In 2005 people were able to register on-line for the annual conference via the AFGC website. In 2003 AFGC launched a monthly electronic mailing to those who have their Email address on file with AFGC. This publication is called "Forage Progress" and is compiled from presentations made at annual AFGC conferences. A quarterly publication, "The Forage Leader" is mailed directly to members and contains information dealing with AFGC events and activities. This publication also contains articles written by producers and forage researchers. The AFGC executive committee uses conference-calling technology to meet on a monthly basis and discuss AFGC matters.

Activities to influence policy or public perception Through its affiliate council structure and the diversity of the board's membership, AFGC is engaged in multiple issues across a broad spectrum of topics. The Director of Legislative Affairs works with the Legislative Committee to prioritise those areas of focus most in need of resource allocation. The Director reports to the board and participates monthly with the Executive Committee. This organisation shares office space in Washington, DC, with the Tri Societies, the Weed Science Society of America and the Society for Range Management (SRM). Most of the work at the federal level involves securing and maintaining research funding for forage-related projects nationwide. As the pre-eminent pasture and harvested forage organisation working primarily in those areas of the country with adequate rainfall, AFGC often partners with SRM to represent the more arid areas of the country on those issues of national or global relevance. Most recently the National Forage Coalition was formed to focus on issues specific to harvested forages. Partnering with AFGC in this effort are the National Hay Association and the National Alfalfa Alliance. Each organisation has three individual representatives on the coalition. In the conservation arena AFGC is a founding member of the Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative and participates with them both in policy development and funding issues specific to grasslands conservation. Issues forums at the Annual Conference and participation in numerous industry and public policy workshops keeps AFGC engaged with a changing network of responders and influencers. Segment-specific or regional-specific trade groups also receive policy influence assistance through their membership in AFGC. Examples of the latter would include the United States Dairy Forage Research stakeholder group and the Northeast Pasture Consortium. In 2005 AFGC developed a certification programme for individuals working in the forages area. This programme was initiated to ensure that individuals have met the basic qualifications necessary to carry out professional work in the forages area.

Future initiatives This organisation plans to have some influence on how the forage component is written into the next Farm Bill. In the past several Farm Bills, forages have received little recognition. The AFGC is currently working with SRM in planning a joint conference for 2008 in Louisville, Kentucky. The last time a joint AFGC-SRM meeting was held (1999), it was a resounding success.