

GOOD Grazing MAKES GOOD \$ense



David Surprenant
Dairy Grazing Operation
Kankakee County, Illinois

Time For A Change

For 60 years David Surprenant's Father farmed 160-acres on a corn and soybean operation along with a dairy near Manteno in northeastern Illinois. After his father passed away in 1992, Dave took over the operation. He soon realized they weren't making enough to do more than make ends meet. After reading a magazine article about a grazing operation in the southeast United States, he decided it was time to do something completely different. It was at this point he first toyed with the idea of grazing his dairy cattle. In 1993 he planted his first 40-acre pasture and never looked back.

Whether he knew it or not, Dave's gradual transition to pasture by taking on 40-acre pastures at a time is, in fact, the best way to

learn how to manage a good grazing operation—a little at a time.

With ample amounts of curiosity, persistence, and patience, Surprenant's formerly tilled, black soil corn plots were transformed into high-quality pastures that grow more grass and forage than his cows can eat. He was able to double his herd size and lower his costs.

"Our herds are happy with this rotational grazing system," Dave explains. "They are healthy, my ground is in the best shape imaginable, and our operation is back in the black and making money."

Learning Never Stops

In order to find this success and become a 'local authority' on grazing, Surprenant confirms there was a great deal to learn. In fact, he's STILL learning, as he's found again and again that learning is a continuous process. Grazing requires less labor but it actually takes more brain power, more management and more knowledge of legume and grass species.

"It took a few years for me to learn the in's and out's of the grasses. And it took time for the grass to become well established. But now everything is functioning at an optimal level. My cows and I are now very well trained in the art and science of good grazing," says Dave.





It takes good planning and good strategizing to make a grazing plan work. Graziers must develop a workable and well-designed system, complete with all the fixin's and infrastructure needed, including fencing, permanent travel lanes, water lines, and other time-tested pasture tools.

One issue he needed to address was long-term stability for his grass. *"We needed moisture badly and decided to incorporate an irrigation system. That was a pricy investment, but it's been great for the grass, great for stabilizing our grass growth,"* Dave explains.

Tap Into Resources--And Friends!

Suprenant agrees he could not have found all the answers and gained the technical know-how to create this without input and the chance to 'pick the brains' of others who had gone before him. Attending grazing conferences and events through the Illinois Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI), University of Illinois Extension educators, and visiting with other graziers over the years was critical. According to Suprenaut, it's important to know who to talk to and where to get the tools you'll need for good conservation grazing solutions that work.

"We've learned how to be good grass farmers," Surprenant explains. *"It's about getting back to the basics for us—grazing is the oldest way to feed livestock and it's really the most economical way too."*

Additional Information

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Dave Bishop
Organic Cattle & Poultry Operation,
Logan County, Illinois

Organic Grower, Grazer

Of the new conservation options available in the new Farm Bill, one targets producers with organic operations and those ready to make the transition to organic. It also offers tremendous avenues for success for livestock operators who want to kick it up a notch to a complete grazing operation—one that is sustainable AND profitable. For Illinois producers like this, now is the time to visit with the local Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office and start the process.

The new emphasis on benefits of “locally grown” food and grass-fed beef is based on increased consumer awareness and interest in agricultural products—meat and produce—certified as organic.

More people and food production conglomerates demand organic food options. Just look at the organic food section at your grocery store—it’s getting bigger. The market is here.

Making The Switch

For some, diversifying crops and moving away from a monoculture ag environment is not an option. Many livestock producers fight the battle of finding low-cost and quality feed for their herds. But for some, it might be a smart and profitable fit.

Take Dave Bishop, in Logan County with a 300-acre operation. He grows a variety of specialty crops, grazes cattle and raises poultry. Dave defines himself as an unconventional organic

entrepreneur. He successfully made the switch to organic and keeps records to document and research what works on his ground and why.

Besides being blessed with a patient temperament, Dave relies heavily on the support of other organic producers and his local conservation team at the USDA Service Center.

Be Patient

“You don’t ‘go organic’ overnight,” Dave explains. “It’s called a transition because it takes time. You’re changing the basic elements in your soil and changing the way you manage nearly every single aspect of your operation—that takes at least five to seven years to do it right.”



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Let EQIP Help You

Because it's not something you do solo, he offers some advice on how to tap into the help and guidance that's out there, such as the Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

EQIP now offers conservation technical help and financial assistance for organic operators. Just like traditional ag operations, smaller venues and organic farms, in particular, face their share of natural resource problems. Often, the solutions needed are more complex and labor-intensive because regular "fixes" are not an option.

Illinois producers who contemplate getting into new organic market trends or those who are already organic who need help with specific erosion or management

issues, can now add NRCS and new Organic options of EQIP to their "go to" list.

Bishop encourages new and existing operators to tap into other state and local partners, Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI) representatives and University of Illinois Extension staff, each offer experience, good ideas, and assistance to help grazers find solutions and success.

Grazing Just Works

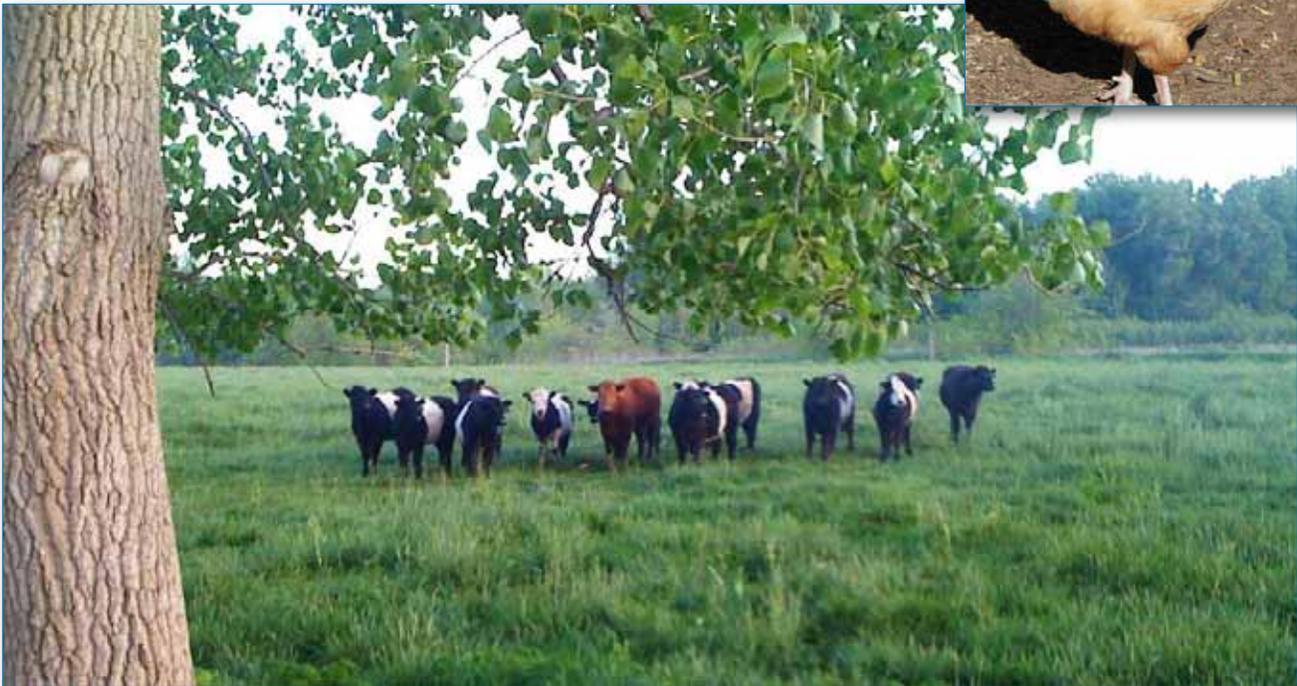
As for Bishop's grazing operation, both NRCS and EQIP helped ensure that aspect of his learning curve continues to have a healthy and happy ending.

With a Grazing Plan, assistance in learning how to manage the grass, Bishop has vigorous, healthy pastures and yes, his cows are happy too! Bishop says

NRCS' specialists and new EQIP options can address the needs of all growers—get help with grazing system success, address soil erosion, manage nutrients, improve water quality or wildlife.

Additional Information

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Ron Freeman
Grass-Fed Beef Operation, Morgan
County, Illinois

Meet A Central IL Cowboy

Grazier Ron Freeman took rolling land in Morgan County, Illinois his Father had raised crops on for decades and converted it into a high quality pasture that supports his profitable grass-fed beef operation.

Using his network of grazing friends from out West, his own innovative and curious tendencies, good old fashioned research and common sense, Ron has become a Grazier extraordinaire in an area some folks might call an unlikely location—Central Illinois.

NRCS Partner, EQIP Supporter

Ron also took advantage of the assistance and support of his local friends at the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), which offers both technical and financial assistance to livestock operators of all kinds—including those interested in pursuing a Grazing Management System.

After a number of years Ron's operation is well established, fully functional and profitable. His pastures are healthy, full of quality

forages, and his herds are healthy and happy the natural way. By managing his grasses and letting the cows do the work, Ron has achieved the ideal life for a cowboy in Illinois.

With a good rotational grazing management process in place and working well, he has created a beautiful and scenic landscape. The Freeman ranch is secure in its economic markets, its resources are protected against erosion, and because the operation is sustainable, he has plenty of time to pursue other interests, adventures, and hobbies that



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Ron's Steps to Good Grazing

1. **Decide why you want to do it. Set some goals and develop a plan.**
2. **Seek technical assistance from NRCS and a qualified grazing mentor.**
3. **Select the grass you want to plant; select species that will thrive on your land.**
4. **Experiment with different seedbed preparation options for grass establishment.**
5. **Keep a journal of what you did where and how.**
6. **Experiment with fences and pasture management; spend time in your pastures.**
7. **Start out small as you learn and increase your knowledge.**
8. **Wait. Be patient as pastures become established.**
9. **Manage your grass.**
10. **Be patient with your cows as they learn and adjust.**
11. **Have a contingency plan and grow a little hay for emergencies.**

give him the cowboy lifestyle he's always craved!

According to Illinois' NRCS Grazing Specialist Roger Staff, Freeman is a good grazing model to follow and he has an ability--and a great deal--to teach others.

Both Freeman and Staff encourage new and existing operators to tap into other experienced grazers, state and local partners, Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI) representatives and University of Illinois Extension staff. Each can offer experience, good ideas, and assistance to help grazers find solutions and success.

Listen, Respond to Pastures

One of the lesser-known benefits of a natural grazing environment is that much of the maintenance, details and work for the herd are taken care of naturally and inexpensively.

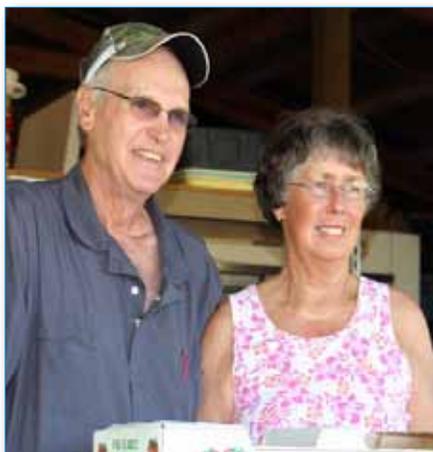
Freeman says "Once you get things in order and get your fencing, watering facilities and such in place, you just maintain order. Establishing the system can be labor intensive initially, but once you're up and running, you reap the benefits of creating a fairly self-sufficient machine. And that leaves time on your hands—something every cowboy needs plenty of," explains Freeman.

"You don't want to be consumed by work. If you are, you will be unable to listen and respond to your pastures."

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Ernie & Judy Duckworth
Cows/Heifers/Angus/Boers Operation
Franklin County, Illinois

Welcome to “Jed’s” Farm

Ernie Duckworth, a Franklin County, Illinois farmer launched an experiment where livestock share paddocks in an intensive grazing system. He has 20 cows, along with 11 heifers in his Angus-Simmental herd. He now also has 31 head of Boer does along with one buck.

His grazing system is nearly complete and fully functional. The pasture system is equipped for intensive grazing of beef cattle, with 13 paddocks in his 43-acre pasture. Plans are to add more strands to the fences to keep the goats in.

The mix keeps Duckworth’s pastures clean, healthy, and full of vigor. According to Ernie, it’s a green way of controlling the weed population because goats eat weeds and stuff cattle won’t eat.

A Diverse Operation

When it comes to farming, Duckworth is a great—and successful—experimenter. He began an intensive grazing program years ago when the concept was still new. He and wife Judy also grow fruits and vegetables in a field across the road from their pastures.

Duckworth has an efficient watering system, thanks to some assistance from the U.S. Department of Agriculture through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). EQIP helped ensure the long-term success and profitability of his grazing operation.

Goats Are In!

How is the goat business? You might be surprised. While the amount of goat meat consumed in the United States is tiny compared to beef, pork and chicken, there is plenty of demand. About 70% of goats consumed in the US are imported—which means





The diverse operation on Jed's Farm--cattle, pasture, goats, and berries--allows for a healthy and ever-changing and sustainable agricultural community that Ernie and Judy find to be profitable--and a lot of fun!



there is a market out there. Goat meat is coveted by many residents of Middle Eastern heritage, among others. The Duckworths have established a marketing plan with a local buyer who takes their goats and sells them in Ohio.

Duckworth expects to continue with the goats and may expand the herd in the future.

According to NRCS Grazing Specialist Roger Staff, *"He's got a great operation and a vision of where he's going."*

"I think his diverse operation is a good idea because when the cattle market's not great, the goats can help with that," Staff explains. "The Duckworth operation knows we have a vast ethnic diversity in this country and their grazing operation

allows a way to tap into that. Plus, he does it all in an environmentally sustainable way, so it's a win-win situation."

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Jeff & Rita Glazik

Cow and Organic Grain Operation
Ford County, Illinois

A Grain & Grass Operation

Jeff Glazik converted a 400-acre farm located near the start of the Middle Fork of the Vermilion River in Ford County, Illinois. He runs certified organic cropland and the rest of his operation is in pasture, natural areas and other conservation practices, including a number of trees.

Conservation crop rotations are a key component of their system because it's a concept and a practice he's used successfully and seen benefits of first hand. Glazik and his family are just learning the options and opportunities their newest friends at the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) have offered through federal conservation programs. They are amazed at the ideas and help they have at their fingertips.

"NRCS has great people and some good and very helpful options that I've put to work on our farm," says Glazik. He finalized his Grazing Management Plan and a Rotational Grazing System and just installed new fence. EQIP offers both technical support and financial support that will help make it all happen.

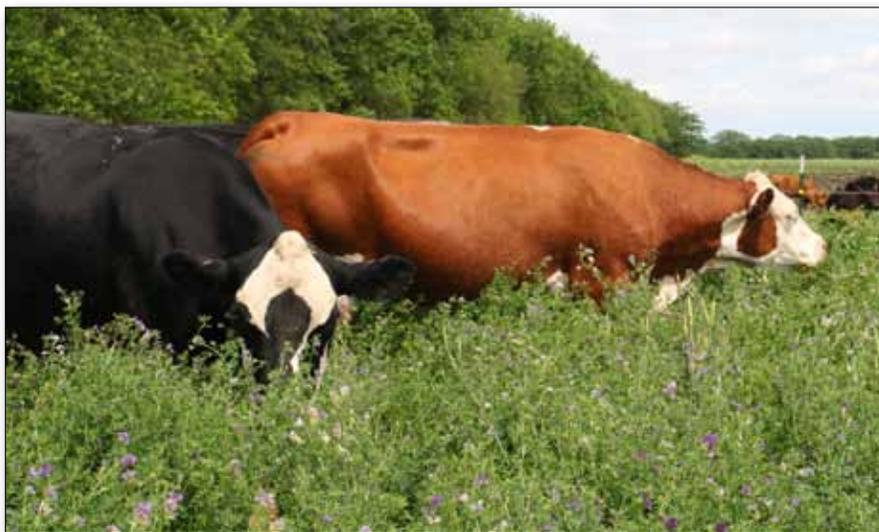
A Perfect Match

Glazik has stock cows and a few hogs, which he sells as meat to local consumers. Some of his most immediate concerns—which EQIP will address—is to remove livestock access to water courses (creek) on the farm. He also wants to reduce erosion and improve water quality. What he has learned to date is how a prescribed grazing

system will offer even better use of his existing crop rotations. "This really is a perfect match for what my land needs, what my cows require, and for what I want to do here. I look forward to working with NRCS on the rest of my plan, which includes incorporating some durable watering systems and some additional fence," Glazik adds.

Glazik looks forward to becoming involved in NRCS' newest conservation program, the Conservation Stewardship Program, or CSP. Eventually, he hopes to take a few corridors of land out of permanent grazing and develop riparian corridors on retired pastureland.

With new fence for his paddocks up and lit, he's turned his cows out



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(Left) Aerial photo in Grazing Management Plan shows Glazik's operation where strips of rotating fields--organic wheat, corn, beans, forage and pasture plantings--lie close to creeks that feed directly into the Middle Fork of the Vermilion River. This is precisely why a conservation-protecting organic operation fits so well.

(Below) Calves born just a few weeks earlier make their way through the forage to meet 'the boss.'

to their new time-share buffet just a few weeks ago. "We've got alfalfa and timothy and clover that's tall and lush. The cows headed out and started munching away. We almost couldn't see the calves with the grass so high, but everyone was happy," Jeff adds with a smile.

The Glazik operation is also home to a large tree planting effort, which includes many tree species well suited to the river bottom area and the wildlife found there.

Nick Fritch, Acting NRCS District Conservationist in Ford County, was instrumental in helping the Glazik operation find options and success.

"Jeff's operation is one I've been proud to be a part of. We've used NRCS' core program and products to do exactly what was needed here. Every one and every resource here will emerge a winner," Fritch said.



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Carzella Pritchett

Goats, Cows, Sheep, and Chicken Operation
Sangamon County, Illinois

A Busy Lady

Carzella Pritchett owns and operates a 10-acre farm in Sangamon County, Illinois. A former horse farm, she purchased it in 2005. You could say it's a hobby farm since Carzella works full-time for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). However, looking closer you can easily see this too is a full-time job with 5 cows, 13 goats, 13 sheep and 250 chickens.

Ask her why she bought a farm while already working full-time and she replies *"I need to stay busy,"* which is an understatement. With her children all grown and moved away, the animals fill a void.

Multi-Species Operation

She began her venture with the Silvered-eared goats. They are raised specifically to sell to the local African population. Then came the chickens—with a majority of them being layers. About 50 are Cornish Cross chickens which are sold for meat. Next the Angus and Herford cows joined in, followed by Katahdin and Suffolk sheep to make up the rest of the family. *"I just love them, they are so colorful,"* she remarked about the Katahdin sheep.



Getting the Farm In Order

Although the pasture, which consisted mostly of legumes, was in relatively good shape when she purchased the farm, there were some soil erosion problems on the site. So, Pritchett had a conservation plan developed to address the issues.

Her conservation plan included the establishment of a grade stabilization structure to protect against further soil erosion and a planned grazing system for the pasture.

Naturally, she sought assistance through NRCS' popular conservation program, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Her conservation plan calls for the entire pasture to be split into smaller pastures, or





paddocks, so she can rotate the animals as they graze. The EQIP contract gives her five years to complete the additions; her plans are to have it all done much sooner.

Get a Good Grazing Plan & Some Local Help

"I plan to have it split into two 5-acre paddocks, but there might be more," said Pritchett. *"I want to get the watering stations installed first."* The new system will make the operation easier to handle. Being a single person, she said it gets difficult dragging those hoses around. She hires help when needed though. During the very hot and cold times of the year, she hires her young neighbor girl to

help gather the eggs. *"I can't always get out there before the eggs are damaged during extreme weather,"* says Pritchett. She also had help removing the old fencing and with other more strenuous activities.

The farm animals are raised organic, even though she is not certified as organic. All products are sold locally. The chickens are processed at the local Amish plant. When there is excess food, she shares it with family and friends or local charities, such as the food pantry and the Women and Children's shelter.

When asked why she took on such a large project at this time in her life, she said, *"I have a goal - to eat*

healthy, stay active and to live a long productive life." Besides the animals, she maintains a garden too. There she grows herbs, greens, squash, and corn *"for me."*

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