



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Illinois Factsheet

GOOD Grazing MAKES GOOD \$ense



Dave Bishop
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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

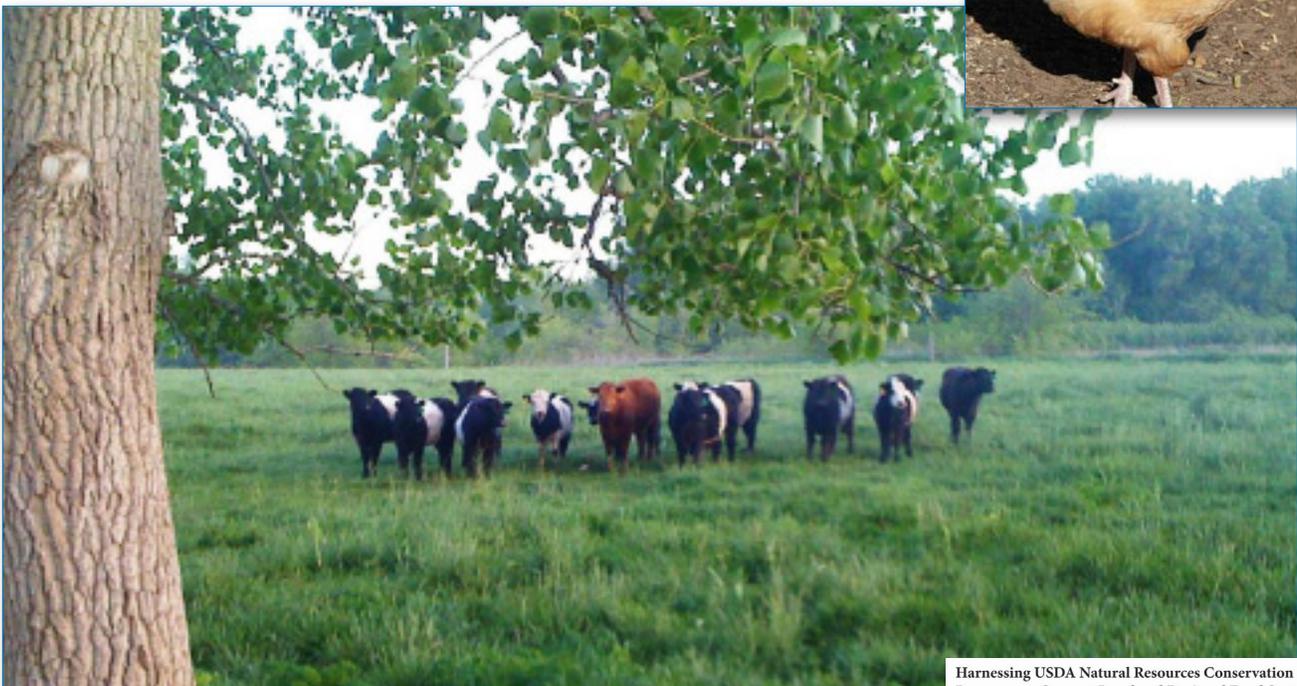
As for Bishop's grazing operation, both NRCS and EQIP helped ensure that aspect of his learning curve continues to have a healthy and happy ending.

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

If you need more information about grazing and programs, contact the NRCS District Conservationist at your local USDA Service Center (listed in the telephone book under U.S. Department of Agriculture), or contact your local soil and water conservation district. Information also is available on the web at: www.il.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/.



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