



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Illinois Factsheet

GOOD Grazing MAKES GOOD \$ense



Ron Freeman
Grass-Fed Beef Operation, Morgan County, 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

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.



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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."

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/.

Harnessing USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Programs to Support Local and Regional Food Systems

