

# Grazing Reserve Easement Program

In the past 40 years we have lost most of our once abundant pasture acres to commodity crops such as corn and soybeans. Minnesota once had a diversified landscape consisting of farms, fields and pastures. Animal agriculture has been disappearing from the rural landscape at an alarming pace and our water quality and wildlife habitat has suffered. The decrease in water quality and increase in water quantity can be partially contributed to Government sponsored conversion to commodity row crop production.

GREP objectives are to reverse this trend and to attempt to level the playing field in farm program opportunities. The goal of GREP is to offer an alternative to subsidized row cropping. GREP would offer a program to restore our lost pasture acres and to give landowners an opportunity to change the landscape through a profitable grazing system. Immediate results in improved water quality and reduced water quantity will be realized. In addition the program will promote a much needed livestock based industry for the agricultural community.

## Objectives:

- Convert Cropland to pasture/grassland with a conservation easement.
- The goal of the program is to remove marginal cropland from crop production while still allowing the landowner to use the land for livestock production.
  - Studies have shown that managed grasslands are more productive for wildlife than areas of untouched grass.
- Program would provide both a water quality and a wildlife benefit.
- State of Minnesota would hold the easements.
- Would use the RIM rates established by BSWR as a guideline for payment amounts.
- GREP would pay for the easement on the land.
  - Other governmental programs could be used for cost-share on items such as fencing and watering systems.
  - If the landowner chooses to use government money to help set up a grazing system on their farm, then a grazing plan would be developed for the site by staff from the appropriate agency.
  - It would be the responsibility of the local USDA/SWCD office to monitor the easement area.
- The area would require a seed mix designed for grazing or haying.
- Landowner would be able to use the grass easement for grazing and/or haying.
- Landowner would be properly educated by the local USDA/SWCD personnel on how to manage their grassland.

- The landowner could rent the pasture.
- The landowner could choose not to graze the area if he/she decided to use the area for wildlife habitat.
- These sites need to be managed in a manner to help control unwanted invasive species including noxious weeds.
- The landowner could sell any hay taken from the site.
- The easement would not require public access.

For more information, contact Jason Beckler or Tom Kalahar at Renville SWCD. Call 320-523-1559 or 320-523-1553 ext 3