

Year Round Grazing in Wisconsin Winter Bale Grazing Offers Perfect Solution



The USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.
March 2014
Wisconsin

Environmental Quality Incentives Program - Grazing Success Story

Winter Bale Grazing Offers Perfect Solution for Richardsons

In 2006, Art and Rheta Richardson were forced to sell their dairy herd after Art suffered a debilitating hand injury. That left them with some difficult choices. "This land is dear to us," Rheta explained. "We could have sold, plowed for corn – it was big decision what to do, at the age of 67."

They had always had a small beef herd, and decided to focus there, at first grazing the old way, like Rheta's dad did when he started in 1959.

NRCS District Conservationist Lisa Neuenfeldt in Waupaca told Art about a great new way to graze when he was in the office working on a nutrient management plan. Lisa considers grazing to be one of the best practices available for soil health and successful family farm operations.

"I was skeptical. But this is such a pleasure. It's fun and so easy, and so much better for the land and our health, and it's profitable," proclaims Art.



Art Richardson (L) and Adam Abel, Soil Conservationist, NRCS.

Getting Started

"NRCS is so helpful, they have been phenomenal," says Art. Adam Abel, NRCS Soil Conservationist, worked with Art to help him get started with a prescribed grazing plan for the farm, including pasture size and layout, fencing and watering systems and how to outwinter cattle in north central Wisconsin.

NRCS helped Art calculate how many animals the land could support, and Art has followed those recommendations when purchasing animals and selling stock. The NRCS technical assistance made all the difference, according to Art and Rheta. They had lots of questions as they got started, and practical guidance from NRCS led to success.

The Richardsons applied for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program for financial assistance for fencing, watering systems and other practices.

Fencing

A well-planned fencing layout allows for flexible management, whether it be grazing, taking a crop of hay, or outwintering. Payments for both interior and perimeter fencing are available through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program.

Watering Systems

All paddocks have water via above ground pipeline for seasonal use. Buried pipelines supply winter water hydrants, which are heated and energy

efficient, allowing steady access through even the coldest days.

Feed and Forage

With 240 acres, 110 acres are now grass and hay for baling, and the rest are fenced and seeded for grazing. Large round bales are harvested through the growing season from the hay fields and also from

the pastures when there is excess forage. With the old grazing system, pastures were depleted by August 1, but with the managed rotation, grazing can continue to November.

Winter Management

In the winter, cattle feed on round bales that have been placed evenly across the field. The portable fencing is easily moved to allow cattle access to a few bales at a time. The outwintered

fields recover very quickly in spring. Different fields are rotated for outwintering each year to move nutrients around the farm.

"The system works for Art and Rheta because they understand about leaving enough residue for healthy and rapid plant regrowth," notes Adam. "What you leave is what you get back."

Art no longer spends hours cleaning barns and hauling feed as he did with the dairy. On his farm, it takes him 15 minutes to move the fence to a new pasture or a new row of bales. Year round grazing systems offer a great alternative for any farm, especially small farms, beginning farmers, and as Art and Rheta demonstrate, retiring farmers.



Lisa Neuenfeldt, District Conservationist discuss grazing plans with grazing farmer Rheta Richardson.

