TODD NOVAK

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 51ST ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

(608) 237-9151
Toll-Free: (888) 534-0051
Rep.Novak@legis.wi.gov

P.O. Box 8953
Madison, WI 53708-8953

DATE: April 8th, 2025

RE: Testimony on Assembly Bill 118

TO: Assembly Committee on Agriculture

FROM: State Representative Todd Novak

Thank you Chairman Tranel and members of the Assembly Committee on Agriculture for holding a public hearing on Assembly Bill 118 (AB 118) which creates a transition to grazing pilot program and provides an appropriation.

I authored this bill with Senator James after initially working on this issue during the budget cycle last session. We authored this bill after being approached by stakeholders and local conservation groups that expressed the need for a grazing grant program in Wisconsin.

Three sessions ago, I chaired the Speaker's Task Force on Water Quality. We held hearings throughout Wisconsin, and heard from dairy business leaders, conservation groups, and local family farmers. From these hearings, it was made clear that farmers want to be the leaders in clean water and conservation efforts, but they need the tools and resources to lead in this important effort.

Our task force has led on legislation that was signed into law that has helped farmers implement practices beneficial to water quality, conservation and their bottom line. The Producer-led Watershed Protection Grant Program, Nitrate Optimization Program and Cover Crop Insurance Rebate Program have become successful conservation programs.

AB 118 further expands on the progress made from our work on the Water Quality Task Force by creating a grazing pilot program. The program administered by the Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection provides farmers with grants to transition fields and pastures to grazing areas.

The transition to grazing pilot program will provide grants to farmers for the following purposes:

1. Assist with establishing perennial forages for rotational grazing of livestock raised in a grass-based managed grazing system.

TODD NOVAK

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 51ST ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

(608) 237-9151
Toll-Free: (888) 534-0051
Rep.Novak@legis.wi.gov

P.O. Box 8953
Madison, WI 53708-8953

2. Provide assistance to establish harvestable continuous cover in marginal areas that can produce supplemental feed for livestock that is raised in a grass-based managed grazing system.
3. Provide a farmer with incentive payments during the first three years of the farmer's transition to grass-based managed grazing systems.
4. Assist a farmer with paying for grass-based managed grazing system infrastructure needs, including fencing, watering, and other livestock management infrastructure.
5. Technical assistance to develop grazing plans, including determining field and paddock layout, infrastructure setup, seed selection, and establishment of rotational grazing patterns.
6. Assistance in navigating grass-based grazing system and grass-fed livestock research and market development initiatives, and market opportunities.
7. Best practices for meeting consumer demand for grass-fed livestock products.
8. Assistance in fostering innovation in and expanding farm and agribusiness strategies in grass-based grazing system and grass-fed livestock practices.

I am proud of the broad coalition of industry stakeholders we have established to support our proposal including: Wisconsin Agri-Business Association, Clean Wisconsin, Dairy Business Association, the Nature Conservancy, Wisconsin Cattlemen's Association, Wisconsin Conservation Voters, Wisconsin Farm Bureau, Wisconsin Farmers Union and Wisconsin Land and Water Conservation Association.

Thank you for your consideration of AB 118.

STATE SENATOR JESSE JAMES 23RD DISTRICT

April 8th, 2025

Representative Tranel, Chair
Representative Moses, Vice-Chair
Members of the Assembly Committee on Agriculture

Testimony on 2025 Assembly Bill 118

Relating to: a transition to grazing pilot program and making an appropriation. (FE)

Thank you, Chairman Tranel, and other members of the committee for hearing my testimony today. Growing up, it was evident why Wisconsin was considered "America's Dairyland". It was commonplace to see rolling fields of cows dotting the landscape, and even today, our state is still heavily associated with this visual. Unfortunately, the modern economy has put Wisconsin farmers in a tough spot. To keep up with global markets, farmers needed to scale their operations. Naturally, they found it easier to consolidate their cattle into free stall barns for quicker access than continue to let them roam large sections of pasture.

However, with an increased number of animals living in a smaller, more defined area, local environments began to be impacted. Farmers face a constant balance between remaining competitive with other producers while keeping their crops, soil, and water healthy, and they have come up with some clever ways to get the best of both worlds. The state has even taken a vested interest in some of these innovative practices, funding programs like the Producer-led Watershed Protection Grants, Nitrate Optimization Program, and Cover Crop Insurance Rebate Program.

Another method that has gained a lot of traction lately is called managed grazing. Managed grazing is an organized grazing system where livestock is systematically rotated between different plots of land to keep grasslands in check. This routine has many benefits, including significantly improving soil health and water quality. It also reduces the amount of manure needed to be stored on the farm, further mitigating potential downsides related to spills and runoff.

Assembly Bill 118 would establish a Transition to Grazing program that would help farmers implement a rotating grazing program. The pilot program would consist of grants that could be used to establish grazing plots, cover the costs of infrastructure needs like fencing, getting technical assistance on grazing plans, among other things. These grants would help farmers move back to the forage-based systems Wisconsin became famous for while remaining competitive in the modern world and being good stewards to the environment.

Thank you all again for hearing this important legislation.

Respectfully,

Senator Jesse James
23rd Senate District
Sen.James@legis.wisconsin.gov

State of Wisconsin
Governor Tony Evers

Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection
Secretary Randy Romanski

RE: Assembly Bill 118 Relating to: a transition to grazing pilot program and making an appropriation.

April 8, 2025

Chairman Tranel and members of the Assembly Committee on Agriculture:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide information about Assembly Bill 118 related to a transition to grass pilot program and making an appropriation. My name is Tim Anderson, and I am Administrator of the Division of Agricultural Resource Management at DATCP.

The bill creates a transition to grass pilot program. The program would provide grants to farmers who implement new grass-based managed grazing systems for their livestock. Grants would be capped at $40,000. These grants would be distributed 75 percent in year one, 12.5 percent in year two, and 12.5 percent in year three. Managed grazing systems are alternatives to continuous grazing with the goal of improving conservation through controlling the density of livestock to maintain perennial grass-based vegetation, ensure regular access to fresh forage, and to reduce soil compaction and erosion.

The bill would create a 0.5 full-time equivalent (FTE) position to support the new pilot program. The pilot program would be funded with a newly created SEG annual appropriation funded at $500,000 with revenue from the Environmental Fund.

DATCP currently administers conservation and market development grant programs. This program would appeal to the agency's customer base.

Thank you again for allowing me to provide information on AB 118. I am happy to answer any questions committee members may have.

SAVE THE DATE!

WI Ag Committee Grazing Tour

~~May 10th, 2024 at 9:30am~~

Event Host: Schoepp Farms LLC

N2007 E. Harmon Rd, Lodi, WI 53555

Schoepp Farms is a well-diversified grazing and cash grain operation that grows over 500 acres of corn, soybeans, winter wheat, and alfalfa, as well as 110 acres of grass-based pastures that are dedicated to raising 200 dairy heifers, 30-50 dry cows, and 15 grass-fed beef. For decades, Ron and his parents, Dave and Nancy Schoepp, have continued to look for ways to implement and promote conservation practices and soil health principles on their farm and their efforts were recently recognized in 2023 when the Schoepps received the Conservation Farm Family of the Year award by the Wisconsin Land and Water Conservation Association.

The tour will last approximately 2.5 hours and will include a field walk, a rainfall demonstration showing flooding resiliency and soil health benefits from the farm's conservation efforts, and a short discussion on opportunities to continue helping Wisconsin's farmers implement these environmentally and economically advantageous practices.

anter by April 30, and we will follow up with more information. If you have
't hesitate to ask. Thank you for your consideration.

rnment Relations Director, Clean Wisconsin
608-251-7020 x330
er@cleanwisconsin.org

Proud to be an American Family Farm

Schoepp Farms

Ron Schoepp
N2007 East Harmon Road
Lodi, Wisconsin 53555
rschoepp84@gmail.com
(608)-576-5585


This is a picture from after a rainfall simulator ran applying 1 and a half inches of rain in just a few minutes
No-Till
Planted Green
Managed Pasture
multi species cover crop No Till
Tilled Row Crop Land
Water in the hanging jars would have infiltrated into the soil
Water in the jars sitting on the ground represent water that would have ran off the field
The 3 jars and soil trays on the left are from our farm
No water would have ran off our fields
The multi species tray and jar are from another farm that practices similar metho

Leadership for Midwestern Watersheds

AGENDA

FEBRUARY 27-28, 2025

STARVED ROCK LODGE & CONFERENCE CENTER

ONE LODGE LANE, OGLESBY, IL 61348

A NETWORK FOR KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE AMONG AGRICULTURAL WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PROFESSIONALS

* *all sessions meet in the* ***Starved Rock Room****, all meals are served in the* ***Great Hall West*** *

Wednesday, February 26th

7:00 PM Pre-event social, hors d'oeuvres and cash bar **(La Salle Room)**

Thursday, February 27th

8:00 AM Registration and breakfast

9:00 AM **Welcome and Introductions** – *Craig Ficenec and Haleigh Summers, Sand County Foundation*

9:15 AM **Regenerative Leadership: Principles for Navigating Your Toughest Challenges** – *Ryan Erisman, Odyssey Collaborations, LLC*

10:40 AM Break

11:00 AM **Lake Wisconsin Alliance Case Study** – *Ron Schoepp, David Kell, and Mike Gleason*

11:20 AM **Farmer-to-Farmer Mentorship Panel Discussion** – *Josh Behnke, Cade Bushnell, Danny Harms, Andy Hawley, Mike Schultz*

12:00 PM Lunch

1:00 PM **The Evolution of Wisconsin's Producer-Led Program** – *Dani Heisler, Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection*

1:30 PM **Leading the Charge: A Discussion with Wisconsin's Farmer Leaders** – *Roger Bindl, Jake Kaderly, John Koepke, Tony Peirick, Brad Robson, Ron Schoepp*

2:30 PM Break

3:00 PM **Updates from the Diverse Corn Belt Project: Enhancing Rural Resilience through Landscape Diversity in the Midwest** – *Emily Usher-DeaKyne, Purdue University*

3:30 PM **Envisioning a Future Landscape** – *Facilitated Small Group Discussions*

4:30 PM Group photo and adjourn

5:30 PM Happy hour, cash bar

6:30 PM Dinner

Friday, February 28th

6:30 AM Optional sunrise hike to Starved Rock, overlooks, canyons

7:30 AM Breakfast

8:00 AM **Farmer-Industry Collaboration to Meet Climate and Water Conservation Goals** – *Jim Eckberg, General Mills*

8:40 AM **Scaling Up Incentives: Cover Crop Case Studies** – *Scott Hendricks, Allisen Freihage, Josh Behnke, Paul Meuer, Erik Joost, John Koepke*

9:15 AM Break

9:45 AM **The Conservation Practitioner Poll: What Do We Need to Get More Conservation on the Ground?** – *Catherine DeLong, Iowa State University*

10:15 AM **Updates from the Fields of Sinsinawa, A Farmer-led Learning Center** – *Julia Gerlach, Rick Bieber, Tony Peirick*

10:25 AM **Farmer Leadership Roundtables** – *Join in-depth discussions with the farmer-led group leaders of your choice*

11:00 AM Break

11:15 AM **Closing Activity**

11:45 AM Lunch and Adjourn

Farmer-led Watershed Groups

Mike Gleason - Vice President, Lake Wisconsin Alliance

Mike is a Chicago native who studied health administration at Western Illinois University. After retiring from a 37-year career in international air freight management at O'Hare International Airport he and his wife moved to their summer home in Merrimac, Wisconsin. It was there he joined the Lake Wisconsin Alliance to help improve the ecological conditions of Lake Wisconsin and the Wisconsin River. Through community education and collaboration, he is working toward that goal.

Danny Harms - Co-Chairman, Vermilion Headwaters Watershed Committee

Danny farms in partnership with his father and uncle. Five years ago, they transitioned from conventional tillage to strip-till and no-till practices, and began growing cover crops. They also operate a business that provides custom strip till, spraying, and side-dress applications for other farms. Danny serves on the Indian Creek Watershed Steering Committee, Vermilion Headwaters Committee, and the newly formed FLASH (Farmer Led Advances in Soil Health) group.

Andy Hawley - Hawley Family Farm

As a sixth-generation farmer in Jo Daviess County, Illinois, some of Andy's first memories include his father teaching him and his brother Mark about no-till and soil conservation. They have since taken the farm's conservation practices to the next level and hope Andy's sons will do the same. Andy is a Jo Daviess County Soil & Water Conservation District board director. He also serves on the steering committee for the farmer-led Jo Daviess County Soil & Water Health Coalition.

Dani Heisler - Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant Program Manager, Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection

Dani supports 50 producer-led groups throughout Wisconsin in her role with Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection. In addition to sharing her passion for agricultural conservation, she practices the art and science of managed grazing in Wisconsin's Driftless Area. Dani grew up on a beef operation in western Wisconsin, and received a Bachelor of Science, studying animal science, agronomy, and food science at the University of Wisconsin at River Falls.

Scott Hendricks - Conservation Agronomist, Dubuque County Watersheds

Scott works with Dubuque County farmers to identify and implement conservation practices that benefit their bottom line and the county's watersheds. His work focuses on soil health and helping farmers improve their return-on-investment. He also helps implement conservation practices with a renter on his family farm near Dubuque, where he also enjoys hunting and fishing. Scott also loves to travel, hike, and camp.

Erik Joost - Watershed Manager, City of Oconomowoc

Erik guides Oconomowoc's adaptive management program to reach compliance with phosphorous water quality standards in the Oconomowoc River. The program, started in 2015, focuses on watershed-wide P reduction strategies, including land management practices, lake improvements and stream restorations. Erik also helps to coordinate the Farmers for Lake Country producer-led group, which fosters peer-to-peer learning about farming strategies that promote soil health and preserve water quality.

David Kell - President, Lake Wisconsin Alliance

David has enjoyed Lake Wisconsin since 1978 and has owned lakefront property since 1989. As leader of the Lake Wisconsin Alliance, he works to improve the lake's watershed by encouraging networking among lakefront landowners, farmers, and other businesses. The Lake Wisconsin Alliance endeavors to balance the diverse interests of the Lake Wisconsin community while improving water quality, recreational opportunities, and sustaining a healthy ecosystem within the Lake Wisconsin watershed.

John Koepke - Koepke Farms Inc.

John is a member of Koepke Farms Inc., a family partnership milking 320 cows, cultivating 1,000 acres of crops, and managing 150 acres of woods and wetlands. The Koepkes were early adopters of sustainable practices, including no-till farming, contour strip cropping, diversified crop rotation, nutrient management, cover crops, and grassed waterways. As a leader in the ag community, John has helped shape key policies at the local and state level. His commitment to preserving his family's land reflects his dedication to protecting farmland across Wisconsin.

Paul Meuer - Land Protection Manager, Tall Pines Conservancy

Tall Pines Conservancy is a nationally accredited land trust in southeast Wisconsin's Lake Country region. An experienced conservation professional, Paul has worked nationwide as a professional wetland scientist, restoration ecologist, and environmental consultant. At Tall Pines, he leads efforts to protect land through conservation easements and acquisitions, while stewarding properties like the 260-acre Ravensholme Farm Preserve. Paul is dedicated to preserving natural resources and supporting sustainable land management.

Tony Peirick - T&R Dairy

Tony is the President of the Dodge County Farmers for Healthy Soil-Healthy Water group. He is a partner in T&R Dairy farm near Watertown, Wisconsin, with 200 dairy cows and 1,100 acres of corn for grain and silage, soybeans, and forages. Tony has been experimenting with cover crops for 12 years and has been planting green for the past 7 years. His farm also does custom spraying and harvesting as well as planting cover crops for his neighbors.

Bradley Robson - Robson Family Farm

Brad grew up on a small dairy farm in the hills of Vernon County, Wisconsin, where he now raises hay, corn, soybeans, small grains, alternative forages, cover crops, prairie strips, and a cow-calf herd on pasture. He farms in partnership with his parents and son. Brad is a co-founder and farmer leader of the Hill Country Watershed Alliance. He chairs the Valley Stewardship Network and is a conservation agronomist with the Monroe County Land Conservation Department.

Ron Schoepp - Schoepp Farms

Ron farms with his parents, Dave and Nancy, and son Noah at Schoepp Farms LLC in Columbia County, Wisconsin. They grow corn, soybeans, winter wheat, alfalfa, and graze cattle. Ron is a board member of Sauk Soil Water Improvement Group, Lake Wisconsin Farmer Watershed Council, and the River Alliance of Wisconsin. In 2023 the Schoepps were named the Conservation Farm Family of the Year by the Wisconsin Land and Water Conservation

DAIRY STAR
Second Section
World Dairy Expo Special Edition
September 14, 2024

A finely choreographed dance

Expo travels take Paulson a month to complete

By Danielle Nauman
danielle.n@dairystar.com

MADISON, Wis. — Allyn "Spud" Paulson holds an unusual title in the arena of all things World Dairy Expo — he is the first person to begin traveling to the Alliant Energy Center and the last one to make it back home.

"It gets a little hectic and sometimes trying to remember where I am, and where I need to be is a challenge," Paulson said. "It's just what I've done because I need to do it. In 2022, we hauled 102 head into Expo."

In mid-September, while the show world is gearing up for the All-American Dairy Show in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, Paulson begins the real-life game of Tetris that is his Expo trip.

"I'll run a load out to New York and stage the truck at Greg Evans' or Anthony Crothers' place," Paulson said. "They'll take care of getting it ready for their trip. I'll fly out to ReAnn Genetics in Riverdale, California. They have their own straight deck, so I'll haul the cows and their crew will follow with their tack."

In that trip, Paulson's destination is his farmette near Rockford, Illinois, where the ReAnn Genetics cattle and crew spend a few days recovering from the three-day trip from California.

"It's peaceful for them there, the cows are box-stalled and can get out on dirt," Paulson said. "The ReAnn crew stays in my house and takes care of their cows until it's time for them to head to Expo."

While the California cows and crew settle in, Paulson will keep busy making preparations

Turn to PAULSON | Page 2

PHOTO SUBMITTED

Arturo Perez (front, from left), Allyn "Spud" Paulson, Gerardo Ochoa and Luis Roa; (back) Dennis Rowan, gather in 2022 in Rockford, Illinois. Paulson hauls animals to and from World Dairy Expo.

Changing practices for the better

Schoepp speaks about family, conservation ahead of virtual farm tour

By Meghan Kropp
meghan.k@dairystar.com

LODI, Wis. — Early October will be busy for Ron Schoepp, one of the managing members of Schoepp Farms LLC, as he will be hosting a virtual and an onsite farm tour during this year's World Dairy Expo.

The first is the virtual farm tour at Expo, which will begin at 10 a.m. on Tuesday, Oct. 1, at the Alliant Energy Center in Madison.

"It's kind of cool to have this opportunity," Schoepp said. "It's a once-in-a-lifetime thing. You've got to do it when you get that chance."

Schoepp said Expo offers something for everyone, ranging from products and tools to information on services to cattle shows.

He said the theme this year is "The Golden Age" and he hopes that tours like the ones he will be giving can help keep generational interest in farming.

"My dad has had the honor of working with almost all of his grandsons for a summer," he said. "I think there was an 11-year span on our farm when at least one of his grandsons summered for him. My daughters worked with him, too."

Schoepp said his goal for the virtual and onsite tours is to help people change their practices for the better by showing some of the many facets of Schoepp Farms.

"You have to be able to raise your family. You have to be able to make money doing it," Schoepp said. "I know what we're doing, you can make a living doing it."

According to the Expo website, Schoepp Farms is a grazing and cash grain operation with more than 400 acres of corn, soybeans, winter wheat and alfalfa, as well as 110 acres of grass pasture. Schoepp and his family raise 200 dairy heifers and 30-50 dry cows while focusing on conservation.

"I really think Wisconsin is as good as anybody in conservation and conservation collaboration, being able to work with so many different groups," he said. "I really think we are ahead of the game."

Conservation for his farm includes clean water, clean air and caring about the soil, Schoepp said.

"I know a lot of people still aren't really concerned about that," he said.

Turn to SCHOEPP | Page 5

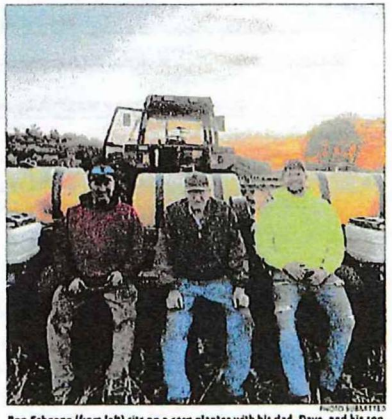


PHOTO SUBMITTED

Ron Schoepp (from left) sits on a corn planter with his dad, Dave, and his son, Noah near Lodi, Wisconsin. The Schoepps will be hosting a virtual and an onsite farm tour during this year's World Dairy Expo.

Continued from SCHOEPP | Page 1

PHOTO SUBMITTED

The Schoepp family — Kami Dellinger holding her daughter (front from left), Lylia Schoepp, Bethany Johnson, Nancy Schoepp, Dave Schoepp, and Ron Schoepp; (back from left) Joe Dellinger, Daven Sabatke and Noah Schoepp — gather on their farm near Lodi, Wisconsin. Schoepp and his family raise 200 dairy heifers and 30-50 dry cows while focusing on conservation.

"I think keeping the soil where it is and the nutrients where they are is very important."

Schoepp said keeping nutrients in soil, and soil in place, has been something his family has been doing for the past 30 years through different methods like no-till and rotational grazing.

"Our first field day at our farm was in 1996," he said. "We are talking about a lot of the same things we were doing back then, minus the grazing. We started rotational grazing a couple of years after that field day and really bumped it up in 2008. We started implementing animals back onto row crop land during the winter in 2005."

> **"I think being able to hopefully influence change for the better around the world is maybe what I'm most excited about. I hope someone sees this and thinks maybe this will work on their farm."**
>
> RON SCHOEPP

The Schoepp Farms All Good Things booth, located near the entrance of WDE, will give attendees a chance to talk with employees of some of the organizations Schoepp and his family have worked with over the years. Organizations represented at the booth include state and county governments, local farmer-led watershed groups and nonprofits.

"We work with all these different organizations," he said. "We've collaborated with them all through the years and (are) just trying to get more people to do good things is basically what it is about."

Schoepp has a second tour planned that week, though it will not be sponsored by WDE.

"We are doing the virtual tour, but also are having an in-person tour Oct. 3 at our farm that is tied with the Match Made in Heaven project," he said.

Match Made in Heaven: Livestock + Crops is a project hosted by Green Lands Blue Waters as a collaboration between multiple different groups to share interests, challenges and needs in support of farmers, according to the organization's website.

"I think being able to hopefully influence change for the better around the world is maybe what I'm most excited about," Schoepp said. "I hope someone sees this and thinks maybe this will work on their farm.".

Regional Conservation Finance Ag Educator Training

September 16-17, 2024

Arlington Agricultural Research Station, Arlington, Wisconsin

Agenda

Monday September 16, 2024

Please note, all sessions for Monday, September 16th will take place at Arlington Agricultural Research Station located at N695 Hopkins Road in Arlington, Wisconsin

Time	Program
11:00AM	Workshop Welcome
11:10 – 12:00PM	Economics of Regenerative Agriculture: A Holistic Approach *Jeff Hadachek, Assistant Professor in Agricultural and Applied Economics, UW-Madison*
12:00 – 1:00 PM	Economics of Nutrient Management *Paul Mitchell, Professor of Agricultural and Applied Economics, Extension State Specialist, and Director of the Renk Agribusiness Institute, UW-Madison*
1:00 – 1:30PM	LUNCH
1:30 – 2:30PM	The Economics of Reduced Tillage and Cover Crops: Exploring Aggregated Data *Micheal Langemeier, Associate Director for the Center for Commercial Agriculture and Professor of Agricultural Economics, Purdue University*
2:30 – 3:00PM	SHARE: Soil Health Alliance for Research and Engagement Ashley Waggoner, *Engagement Coordinator for the Soil Health Alliance for Research and Engagement (SHARE) and Soil Scientist, US Dairy Forage Research Center*
3:00PM	BREAK
3:15 – 4:00PM	Connecting Soil Health to Economics: A Look at Balancing Farm Goals *Micheal Langemeier, Associate Director for the Center for Commercial Agriculture and Professor of Agricultural Economics, Purdue University*
4:00 – 5:00PM	Tips and Tricks for Working with Farmers on Economics *Serge Koenig, Conservation Technician, Sauk County Land Resources and Environment Department, and Connor Laukant,* Laukant Farms
5:00 – 5:45PM	BREAK AND DINNER
5:45 – 6:15PM	Wisconsin's Producer-Led Watershed Protection Program *Dani Heisler, Producer-Led Program Manager, Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection*
6:15 – 7:00PM	Producer Panel and Group Dinner

Tuesday, September 17, 2024

Time	Program	Location
7:30AM	Bus departs Arlington Ag Research Station	N695 Hopkins Road Arlington, WI
8:00AM	Arrive at US Dairy Forage Research Farm in Prairie du Sac	S8046 US-12, North Freedom, WI 53951
8:00 – 10:30AM	Tour of US Dairy Forage Research Farm	S8046 US-12, North Freedom, WI 53951
10:30AM	Bus departs US Dairy Forage Research Farm	S8046 US-12, North Freedom, WI 53951
10:45AM	Arrive at Schoepp Farm Sauk Pasture	Sauk City, WI
10:45 – 11:30AM	Tour of Sauk Pasture	Sauk City, WI
11:30AM	Bus departs Sauk Pasture	Sauk City, WI
12:00PM	Arrive at Schoepp Home Farm in Lodi	E Harmon Rd, Lodi, WI
12:00 – 1:00PM	Lunch at Schoepp Home Farm	E Harmon Rd, Lodi, WI
1:00 – 3:00PM	Tour of Schoepp Home Farm	E Harmon Rd, Lodi, WI
3:00PM	Bus departs Schoepp Home Farm	E Harmon Rd, Lodi, WI
3:30PM	Arrive back at Arlington Ag Research Station	N695 Hopkins Road Arlington, WI

All times are listed in central times. Please note, all meals noted are provided. Times are subject to change ahead of the meeting.

This material is based upon work that is supported by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture, under agreement number 2023-38640-39573 through the North Central Region SARE program under project number ENC23-221. USDA is an equal opportunity employer and service provider. Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the view of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

In support of 2025 assembly Bill 118

Ryan Sullivan- Co owner of Sullivan Family Farm, Manitowoc Wi, member of Wisconsin Farmers Union, and a founding member of the 7 rivers farmer lead watershed group.

I'm a husband, a father of three, retired air force veteran with 26 years of service, now a full time farmer. My wife and I moved back to Wisconsin, where she grew up, to intentionally start a farm, to provide our children with the best food possible. And to be a part of and serve our community. We currently operate a forty acer beef and lame rotational grazing operation. When we moved to Wisconsin at the beginning of 2014 we started building our 5 acer home farm from scratch. We were able to participate in the NRCS equip program to start building infrastructure. Using this program and a lot of sweat equity we were able to establish our grazing system.

My wife and I have slowly built our lamb and beef grazing operation and we consistently see the positive effects of grazing in the health of the animals, the improving health of the soil, and the nutrient dense, high quality, pastured products we produce. Grazing offers a production model that builds wealth in the soil over time. The symbiotic interaction of intensive grazing and the application of soil health principles improves not only soil health but impacts the entirety of the surrounding ecosystem.

It takes a lot of courage and vision to start a farm and to dedicate yourself to this profession. The funding and technical support provided by Assemble Bill 118 will be an essential tool for existing and new farmers, to continue to make grazing a sustainable reality. Initial Start up costs for infrastructure can be a huge barrier for entry for many new grazers. Assembly bill 118 will be an enormous resource for new farmers to establish a grazing operation. With 75% of the awarded grant amount available within the first year, new grazers will be able to build the infrastructure necessary to start a grazing program. This will have a tremendous benefit to new grazers and to the state of Wisconsin. As a founding member of the 7 rivers farmer lead watershed group I not only value all the benefits grazing has to offer, but also value making grazing a viable option for more farmers.

I sincerely ask you to support assemble Bill 118 and contribute to the agricultural leadership of the next generation of grazers in Wisconsin.

Foxhead Regenerative Agriculture Project

foxheadag.org N6498 State Road 49, Green Lake, WI 54941 (920) 212-8952 grow@foxheadag.org

Thank you for considering the Transition to Grazing Pilot Program and for the opportunity to speak with you today.

My name is Andrew, and I'm the Farm Programs Director of Foxhead Regenerative Ag Project, a nonprofit based in Green Lake County. We work to cultivate a local agriculture network that benefits our community and ecosystem.

Each day that I work with our partner farms and farmers, I hear the same things:

The barriers to entry are too high, we don't have enough resources to manage so many spinning plates, and we don't know where to start.

Farmers are the stewards of Wisconsin, a place that is rich with agricultural tradition and where the farmer is celebrated. But as we raise them up as the backbone of the state, we rarely hear of the struggles and challenges they face as the stewards of the land. Even if they would like to change their practices, the costs and knowledge barriers are often too high. We run a decade behind leading research as best practices are slowly adopted due to these barriers. As our understanding of the natural world slowly improves, it is our duty and responsibility to make sure we are doing everything that we can to protect one of Wisconsin's best assets: our farmers and land.

Consider that for the average beef operation in Wisconsin, getting the grazing system in place is only half the battle. Once there is a product to sell, the farmers have to find somewhere to sell it. Our farmers need help finding viable markets, finding and keeping customers, and making their whole system financially productive. We need to remember that today's farmers have more than just a farm to run. They have to handle the whole business side of things as well, from packaging and distribution, to marketing, websites, social media, and customer service.

Most farmers want to do things the right way, but don't have as much time and resources when interacting with the modern marketplace. When their responsibilities get to be too many, they get out of the business. We lose all those services, we lose local food, rural economy and community. We lose our next generation to jobs in the cities. We lose our family farms to megafarms and housing developments.

If we want more farmers trying these systems which care for our soil, water, wildlife habitat and communities, we need to lower the barriers. Make entry as easy as possible. Lighten the risk so it is not all on them, and have a state that supports them. Have staff at our state dept of ag dedicated to grazing. Have local organizations with boots on the ground staff to come out, walk the farm, answer the questions, soothe their concerns. Right now, our organization can hand

them a few info sheets, point them to some youtube videos, and maybe connect them with another grazing operation in the area. But if they need cost-sharing resources we have to tell them sorry, if your land wasn't previously in row crops, there's not much we can do.

Soil and biodiversity are limited resources. If Wisconsin is going to continue to be an agricultural state, we must invest in our resources, and make sure they are here for future generations. We owe it to the future farmers and citizens of Wisconsin to do things the right way. As one farmer said "Farming that provides public benefits deserves public investment." Supporting the Transition to Grazing Pilot Program provides benefits to all of us and is worthy of our investment by providing healthier food produced in a healthier environment.

Programs like "Transition to Grazing" support our farmers to provide more than food, fiber, and fuel. These grants would be paying farmers for ecosystem services which provide clean air, water filtration, productive soil and carbon sequestration. The value of these are incalculable, and largely realized in our future generations. The future residents of Wisconsin deserve this forethought and direction to make sure that the landscape and agricultural industry can grow and develop into something that benefits everyone.
An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure: it is cheaper to invest in preventing resource degradation, even when it sounds expensive, than trying to clean it up later. But this is more than just resource conservation. Supporting this program is investing in Wisconsin's people, in farmer livelihoods and local economies, in our rural communities, in our local food system, and in our children's future.

Thank you for your time and support of this important bill.

Andrew Griffin
Farm Programs Director
Foxhead Regenerative Agriculture Project
(FoxRAP)

Date: April 8, 2025
To: Assembly Committee on Agriculture
From: The Clean Water Initiative (Clean Wisconsin, WI Dairy Business Association, Wisconsin Land and Water Conservation Association, The Nature Conservancy)
RE: Assembly Bill 118 – Transition to Grazing Program

We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony and support for Assembly Bill 118 to create a transition to grazing program. We want to thank Senator James and Representative Novak for their leadership on this issue and to Chair Tranel for bringing this important bill up for a public hearing. We are here as the Clean Water Initiative, which is our ongoing, six year-old collaboration by Clean Wisconsin, the Dairy Business Association, the Nature Conservancy and the Wisconsin Land and Water Conservation Association to find common ground on water quality and agricultural issues, striving for policies and programs that promote clean water and resilient farms.

In brief, the "Grazing Bill" creates a new program at the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection to provide grant money and technical assistance to help farmers establish managed grazing systems for livestock on their land.

Managed grazing is more than just pasturing animals. Managed grazing is a farming practice where livestock are systematically rotated through pasture units with multispecies mixes of grasses and forbs to optimize livestock nutrition and the land's health. In addition to providing excellent feed to pastured livestock, managed grazing on perennial grasslands provides significant soil health and water quality benefits. Managed pastures act like a sponge by absorbing rainfall from even the most intense precipitation events which reduces flooding in rural areas, captures and filters fertilizer and manure nutrients and pesticides, and builds soil health and organic matter through its deep-rooted plants. The program this bill creates would support both transitioning new acres into managed grazing areas as well as landowners choosing to renovate low-productivity pastures into high producing managed grazing systems.

In Wisconsin, grassland acreage has declined 39% over the past two decades and institutional support has likewise declined over a similar timeframe. Prior to 2012, Wisconsin's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) partnered with the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) to dedicate funding to support grazing planning and implementation through the federal Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI). Before federal and state funding ended in 2013, this program provided easily accessible funding to support grazing system planning, farmer to farmer engagement on grazing strategies, and the technical support needed to implement those grazing plans.

At its peak in the early 2000's, the program provided a combined total of just under $1 million in federal and state funding for competitive grants for managed grazing education, technical assistance

and research. However, prescribed grazing support from the federal government declined by 55.4% between 2005 and 2020.

Wisconsin's agricultural landscape offers significant potential for expanded managed grazing on livestock operations of all sizes. The 2017 Census of Agriculture noted that only 6,700 of Wisconsin's nearly 31,000 livestock farms practiced rotational grazing at some level within their operations. Since actively milking dairy cows need to make their way into the milking parlor 2-3 times each day, they can be more work to pasture, however milk cows are only about one-third of the state's cattle, meaning over two-thirds of our state's dairy and beef cattle are conducive for grazing, including dry cows and heifers. As an example, a 2021 case study on Brey Cycle Farm in Door County demonstrated the environmental and economic benefits of managed grazing when they transitioned 140 acres of a corn silage-alfalfa rotation into rotational managed grazing for their dairy heifers and beef cattle. By converting from row crops, Brey's were able to reduce P runoff by 126 lbs/year and reduce soil erosion by over 200 tons of soil, all while saving an estimate $1.50/head/day of animal management costs through reduced feed, fertilizer and fuel costs on that 140 acres of land.

There is also real evidence that interest in managed grazing is growing among Wisconsin's livestock farmers. NRCS has been the main funder of grazing practices in the state since the end of the Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative, and while over $700,000 was obligated to grazing related practices in 2022, an average of 75% of applications to NRCS conservation programs went unfunded, mainly due to lack of funds, and with ongoing uncertainty around federal funding at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, a lack of congressional consensus on the Farm Bill and the Conservation Title programs for NRCS, farmers face an uncertain future in accessing federal dollars they rely on for stability and innovation.

The Wisconsin-born Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship (DGA) Program links current and aspiring grazers in the transfer of farms and grazer skills and knowledge through a carefully designed educational platform that integrates classroom learning with real-world grazing implementation experiences. Since its creation in 2010, the DGA has expanded to 14 additional states and has approved more than 200 mentors to assist beginning grazers in implementing this sustainable form of livestock management. UW-Madison's Grassland 2.0 and NRCS recently launched the Grassland Academy's "Foundations of Grazing Planning" educational program which aims to train farmers and ag consultants to write managed grazing plans. Their debut class was filled in just three days and graduated over 80 agricultural operators and other professionals from the program. Furthermore, county land and water conservation department and state agency staff indicate a growing interest in grazing among producers they work with, and an increased demand for technical support on this topic.

Since the Speaker's Task Force on Water Quality convened in 2019, the state legislature has enacted several popular and successful programs to help agricultural producers improve water quality. Much like the Producer-led Watershed Grant Program, the Transition to Grazing Program will revitalize the peer-to-peer learning environment that is fundamental to successful, sustainable, long-term agricultural conservation practice implementation. The Transition to Grazing Program will create the opportunity for farmers to learn from one another at farm field days, pasture walks and through research participation about the very real money savings and environmental improvements grazing

systems can generate. Just like all of DATCPs landowner cost-share incentive programs, the Transition to Grazing program would include provisions intended to ensure the funding is appropriately spent.

In summary, we know managed grazing provides significant economic advantages to farmers and tangible environmental benefits, which I expect you will hear more about today from grazers themselves. We also know farmers are interested in establishing managed grazing systems on their farms. However, they need access to resources and expertise to begin transitioning acreage in those systems. Assembly Bill 118 fills that need. The Clean Water Initiative is excited to support this important legislation, and happy to answer any questions Committee members might have.

Wisconsin Farm Bureau FEDERATION

Testimony on 2025 Assembly Bill 118

Assembly Committee on Agriculture
April 8, 2025

Thank you, Chair Tranel and members of the committee, for the opportunity to testify on 2025 Assembly Bill 118. On behalf of the Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation, we would like to express our support for this important legislation and appreciate the bill's authors, Senator James and Representative Novak, as well as all those in co-sponsorship, for your willingness to work with agriculture industry stakeholders to support this initiative and your continued leadership in supporting farmer-led approaches to improve water quality and build resiliency and diversity in Wisconsin's agricultural portfolio.

Wisconsin Farmers lead the nation in on-farm conservation. This legislation would add a new building block to the agricultural conservation portfolio that continues and expands Wisconsin agriculture's important leadership.

Assembly Bill 118 creates a new Transition to Grass Program under the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection to support farmers looking to adopt managed grazing systems. Managed grazing is a proven, farmer-led conservation practice that delivers both economic and environmental results. By rotating livestock through managed pasture units, farmers can create value-added livestock products, reduce input costs, and build resilience into family farming operations. These systems have also contributed to better water quality by reducing runoff and improving soil structure, something especially important in a state with such a strong dairy and livestock tradition.

Assembly Bill 118 continues Wisconsin's tradition of farmer-led or peer-to-peer learning and would provide necessary structure and technical assistance that supports our farmers wanting to incorporate innovative and nation-leading agricultural practices into their operations.

Wisconsin has nearly 31,000 livestock farms, only a small percentage currently utilize rotational grazing. Some much smaller existing programs at the federal level and in academia have shown economic and environmental value in managed grazing systems and a state-backed program would supplement the effort to help farmers adopt or enhance these systems. Assembly Bill 118 provides that path.

Wisconsin Farm Bureau supports efforts, such as Assembly Bill 118, which keep farms profitable and protect our natural resources. This bill is an adaptive, farmer-driven investment in practices that can work for numerous family farms.

Wisconsin Farmers Union

UNITED TO GROW FAMILY AGRICULTURE

Tuesday, April 8th 2025

Assembly Committee on Agriculture

Re: Assembly Bill 118; Relating to: a transition to grazing pilot program and making an appropriation.

Chair Tranel and members of the committees, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Assembly Bill 118.

Wisconsin Farmers Union's grassroots, member-driven policy reads:

"Funding for a full-time grazing support person at the state level must be allocated;

Farmers' livelihoods are tied to the weather, leaving farmers especially vulnerable to such changes in climate. Farmers are also in a unique position to mitigate the impacts of GHG emissions and adapt to changing climate by: Investing in climate smart Ag practices that build soil health such as perennial crops and cover crops, employing no-till / low-till practices, and utilizing rotational grazing;

Wisconsin Farmers Union strongly advocates that permanent groundcover and managed grazing, dairy, and livestock systems are the Best Management practice to control soil erosion and phosphorus pollution in our nation's freshwater resources."

This program would provide funding and technical assistance to encourage more farmers to implement livestock grass-based managed grazing systems onto their operations. Managed grazing on perennial grasslands mitigates the impacts of GHG emission, controls soil erosion and phosphorus pollution in freshwater, as well as improves economic stability to the operation. Long term benefits of grazing systems also improve a farm's overall health, and builds its productive capacity. Wisconsin Farmers Union supports the introduction of a Transition to Grazing program at DATCP, under AB 118.

Managed grazing can be implemented on new operations, as well as on established operations, and can be used with any livestock species and adapted to any ecosystem that grows grass. This level of versatility makes grazing central to sustainable agriculture.

WFU members are looking for additional support to expand and start new grazing operations and would be excited to apply for this grant. Support from knowledgeable professionals will help new graziers access and make the most of existing opportunities. Grants will help cash flow necessary infrastructure and manage reimbursement programs in quick succession. Those farmers supported by

128 West River St. • Chippewa Falls, WI 54729 • 715-723-5561 or 800-272-5531
info@wisconsinfarmersunion.com • www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com
Madison Office: 30 W Mifflin St, Ste 905 • Madison, WI 53703 • 608-514-4541

Wisconsin Farmers Union

UNITED TO GROW FAMILY AGRICULTURE

this program can focus on being good farmers and marketing their products instead of navigating programs and identifying resources. Thank you for helping to make this a reality for the next generation of farmers.

Wisconsin Farmers Union thanks the bill authors for putting forth this legislation that strengthens Wisconsin's environment, biodiversity, and the viability of rural economies and communities.

Sincerely,

Michelle Ramirez-White

Government Relations Director, Wisconsin Farmers Union

128 West River St. • Chippewa Falls, WI 54729 • 715-723-5561 or 800-272-5531
info@wisconsinfarmersunion.com • www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com
Madison Office: 30 W Mifflin St, Ste 905 • Madison, WI 53703 • 608-514-4541

DBA
DAIRY BUSINESS ASSOCIATION | DAIRY FORWARD

April 8, 2025

Testimony in Support of Assembly Bill 118
Assembly Agriculture Committee

Good afternoon, Chairman Tranel and members of the committee,

I'm sorry I can't be with you in person today. Below is the testimony I delivered to the Senate Agriculture Committee last week in support of the companion bill, SB 113.

My name is Amy Penterman, and I am a dairy farmer from Throp representing Wisconsin's dairy community and the Dairy Business Association. At my farm, Dutch Dairy in Thorp, WI, my husband, Sander, and I milk 900 cows and farm 1,000 acres. I would like to express my strong support for Assembly Bill 118, which would establish a Transition to Grazing Program at DATCP. This program would provide essential grants to farmers looking to implement managed grazing systems—offering both economic and environmental benefits to farms of all sizes.

As a large dairy farmer, I know firsthand the importance of reducing input costs while maintaining the highest standards of land and water stewardship. Managed grazing offers a cost-effective approach by lowering fuel, feed, and facility expenses, while also improving soil health and water quality. Through this program, more farmers would be able to make the transition, just as other successful initiatives—like the Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grants, the Nitrate Optimization Program, and the Cover Crop Insurance Rebate Program—have helped farmers adopt conservation-minded practices.

For larger dairy farms like mine, the Transition to Grazing Program presents unique opportunities. With growing interest among dairy farmers in raising beef cattle, many of us could use managed grazing systems to transition acres for beef production, helping to meet this demand while diversifying farm revenue streams. Additionally, large dairies could utilize grazing for their young stock and dry heifers, reducing the cost of raising replacements while promoting healthier animals through a more natural environment.

This program would support farmers in:

- Establishing perennial forages and harvestable continuous cover to support livestock feed.
- Investing in infrastructure like fencing and watering systems to make grazing more accessible.
- Receiving technical assistance to develop grazing plans that maximize economic and environmental benefits.
- Navigating market development opportunities for grass-fed livestock products, including beef and dairy.

Beyond these benefits, managed grazing improves soil health and water quality by capturing and filtering nutrients, reducing runoff, and mitigating both drought and flooding risks. It also enhances organic matter in the soil, ensuring long-term sustainability for Wisconsin's agricultural landscape.

Last session, this initiative received bipartisan support, unanimous approval from the Assembly Agriculture Committee, and a well-received Senate hearing. Now, it is time to move forward. By passing Assembly Bill 118, we are investing in a more sustainable, profitable, and resilient future for Wisconsin agriculture—not just for small farms, but for large dairy operations as well.

I urge you to support this bill and help Wisconsin's farmers continue leading in both economic success and environmental stewardship. Thank you for your time and consideration.

2763 Manitowoc Rd Ste B | Green Bay, WI 54311 | 920.883.0020 | dairyforward.com

April 8, 2025

Testimony in support of Grazing Transition Bill

My apologies today that I could not appear in person to support this important bill.
Grazing is such an essential practice or tool for a farmer to possess. It is a learned skill that allows a farmer to harvest and use the forage more completely while the soil is improved from the animal presence instead of the continued compaction from machinery harvesting. Rather, grazing improves the compaction by the animals lighter passing over the land at least once in a seasonal rotation, stimulating the soil and lightly scarifying the forage to enhance better regrowth.

This practice can make a difference especially for a beginning farmer as animals can gather their own feed, allowing for the potential for stored winter feed to be taken from the fields by others. This reduces the need for machinery to be added to start up costs, and allows the farmer to gain by not needing to maintain or repair harvesting equipment.

Financial support for these practices can make the difference in a farmers knowledge of how to successfully improve and use the land to the best of its ability. Mentoring, workshops, pasture walks, and infrastructure support along with grazing plans are valuable to any farmer who hopes to make this practice a successful one. With the average age of the farmer raising, and the need to support future farmers this bill will both keep and allow farmers to enter into this career.

This bill also supports wildlife with the habitat return of the fence line areas to promote habitat areas for birds who desire this area for nesting and small animal shelter. This creates a more robust diversity of environmental stewardship that better enhances nature and is an overall benefit to all, giving the state a great return on investment.

Keeping families on the land is a great investment in rural communities. This bill will increase that possibility for the state and ensure that the future of farming, which can be capital intensive, is more available to those who wish to pursue that way of life. My farm was supported in just this way by an infrastructure grant, and I benefited from the mentorship of attending local pasture walks. When our grazing district was no longer funded we lost a lot, and now have to travel further for those opportunities while trying to promote grazing and sharing knowledge in a less organized fashion.

Thank you so much for your potential investment in the future.

Sincerely,

Linda Ceylor, owner of Hillside Dairy Farm
N3689 Riley Rd.
Catawba, WI 54515

Dear Senate Agriculture Committee, Assembly Agriculture Committee and the Joint Finance Committee (JFC):

My name is Ashley Becker Steele, and I am a PhD student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. I began pursuing my Environment and Resources MS degree here in 2018, but once completed, I felt strongly that I had more questions to explore. Now, I am nearing the end of my PhD degree. Over the last 6.5 years, I have been exploring the impacts of agriculture on soil health and farmer livelihoods. While I grew up on farm primarily growing corn and soybeans in eastern Iowa, I became fascinated by what grazing could do for farmers and the environment.

This first revelation came in my research project to compare soil health between more than 30 paired annual row crop and grazed perennial pasture sites in Wisconsin. In particular, I was interested in comparing how these paired sites differed in soil carbon. Having more soil carbon is important for farmers because it helps water infiltrate during heavy rainfall, and it helps hold onto water during periods of drought. Soil carbon is also crucial for maintaining productivity of agricultural fields. Therefore, a critical observation from that project was that grazed pastures, on average, had ~5 tons more soil carbon per acre in the top six inches of soil compared to the row crop sites. This suggests that grazed pastures offer the best opportunity for building beneficial soil carbon.

In addition to my on-farm soil sampling work, I also had the opportunity to interview all of the farmers who were using grazing during that research project. As part of those conversations, we discussed why the farmers continued to use grazing after they transitioned to the practice. Two quotes have stuck with me. One farmer shared, "Most years, we make the most money per acre on our grazing acres as opposed to row crops." Another farmer shared how grazing provided a "triple bottom line" through "social impacts, economic impacts, [and] environmental impacts". This was impactful because not only did grazing seem to provide environmental benefits that help make farmers more resilient, it provides a good income and lifestyle too.

Thus, aligning with other Wisconsin research and informed by my own experience, my perspective is that grazing provides environmental and financial benefits to farmers.

Sincerely,

Ashley Becker Steele

Dear Senate Agriculture Committee, Assembly Agriculture Committee and the Joint Finance Committee (JFC):

I'm Clarissa Dietz, a PhD student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. I grew up in Dubuque, Iowa, just across the river from Wisconsin, and I have lived here in Madison for five years as a graduate student. As someone who loves the Midwest and the people here, it has been deeply gratifying to do research in pursuit of the Wisconsin Idea that education and research should improve people's lives beyond the boundaries of the university. As part of this effort, I study ways to improve profitability for farmers while protecting important natural resources like healthy soil, clean water, and safe dust-free air.

In 2020, I had the opportunity to work with data from a study that has been going for 30 years to investigate the long-term impacts of crops that are common to Wisconsin. This research, which has been peer-reviewed and published, showed that well-managed pastures, unlike row crops like corn, soy, and alfalfa, were able to build up the organic matter in their topsoil. Organic matter in soil acts like a sponge, helping the soil to hold onto nutrients like nitrates, and it also helps the soil clump together so it does not erode as quickly in the rain or wind.

Because of this, I believe increasing the amount of land used for pasture should improve water quality and air quality for Wisconsin, as well as preserve our agricultural soils for future generations of farmers.

Sincerely,

Clarissa Dietz

Clarissa Dietz

April 8th, 2025

Rachel Bouressa
Bouressa Family Farm
N3775 Ritchie Rd
New London, WI 54961 (Waupaca County)
bouressafamilyfarm@gmail.com
(608)228-6617

RE: Public Hearing - IN SUPPORT OF:

SB 113 : Transition to Grazing Pilot Program.

I want to start by expressing my incredible gratitude for the incredible support on this bill thus far. This bill will offer support for many farmers like me, those farmers that care so much for the land, soil, and the water in our state. These farmers are often beginning farmers or established farmers that find themselves in the crux of figuring out how they can transition their farms to remain viable in an increasingly financially stressed environment with rising input costs and questionable market prices. Transitioning to managed grazing provides many benefits, and should be elevated and continued to be supported by our state, as an asset.

I am a 5th generation farmer in Waupaca County, and rotationally graze beef cattle on my family's land. I am also a UW-Madison CALS alumni, member of Wisconsin Farmers' Union, Farm Bureau, as well as on my local FSA County Committee. It is from my education, experience, passion and pride for what I do and where I'm from that I base my statement of support.

Managed grazing is the most economically and environmentally viable agricultural system to produce quality meat and dairy products in our state, and saved my family farm.
My family farm was a conventional dairy farm (planting corn, beans, hay). During the late 1980's - 1990's when dairy prices dropped significantly, my parents began milking 3 times a day, literally trying to squeeze every ounce of milk from their herd. My dad tweaked rations and took a seed sales route. They could not work hard enough to make ends meet. It was a tough time. Then they heard about managed grazing and were desperate and curious enough to attend a grazing conference. It changed our family's farm story. I think of the 818 dairy farms that finished their last milking, and feel for those.

Recently I spoke with a long-time neighbor and family friend. He highlighted a benefit of the transition to grazing that I hadn't appreciated until he pointed it out. I have a few brothers, who were star athletes in our small town. He noted that when the farm transitioned to grazing, my dad was able to make it to "the kids" events. Managed grazing allowed my dad to be not just a farmer, but also a present and not-so-stressed father

The evidence for the many benefits of managed grazing exists, but there also needs to be support. We're losing SO much support at the federal level, both in financial support to put in valuable and crucial infrastructure, but also the technical assistance and support that is critical for success for new farmers looking to start grazing and those looking to transition.

With regard to water quality, I care about water, both clean drinking water as well as recreational water. Much of our neighborhood is in land managed by a local CAFO. The most recent water test resulted in a nitrate level of 22.3mg/L (10mg/L is the state health standard). Many of us also got flu-like symptoms after the last manure application this fall.

I speak as a beef grazier, farmer and advocate for my neighbors and community. I raise beef cattle on the same pastures as my parents because I believe farming and being a steward of the land is a valuable way of life. I will be a life-long advocate for managed grazing. **Without quality waterways to enjoy and a vibrant and diverse agricultural community, Wisconsin loses so much of what makes it wonderful.**

Much appreciation,
Rachel Bouressa
Beef grazier and farmer/water/soil/wildlife/ecosystem/community advocate
Member: Wisconsin Farmers Union, Waupaca County Farm Bureau, FSA County Committee, GrassWorks, and more.

Dear Wisconsin Assembly Agriculture Committee,

I am writing to encourage you to support Assembly Bill 118: Transition to Grazing Pilot Program, now before the Legislature. As a long-time grazing educator (33 years and counting) and a beef grazier myself, I have seen first-hand the economic and environmental benefits of managed grazing as a means of providing low-cost, high quality feed for livestock. Between 2006 and 2014, I managed DATCP's Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative Grant Program. During that time, we annually transitioned over 11,000 acres of cropland to well-managed perennial pasture. Over the 10-year period the program ran, we saved over 220,000 tons of soil from eroding from farm fields and kept 441,428 pounds of phosphorus out of Wisconsin surface waters. Managed grazing is the gold standard for delivering both natural resource stewardship and financial sustainability for livestock and dairy farms. I see this new pilot as a great step toward restoring the support we once had for this practice that provides so many benefits for the citizens of Wisconsin.
Thank you!

Kindest regards,
Laura Paine
(608)338-9039
lkpaine@gmail.com

Prof. Adena Rissman, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Legislative testimony, Agriculture Committee 4-7-25

Hello! My name is Adena Rissman and I'm a professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Thank you to the members of the Committee for having this hearing. I'm writing for informational purposes only.

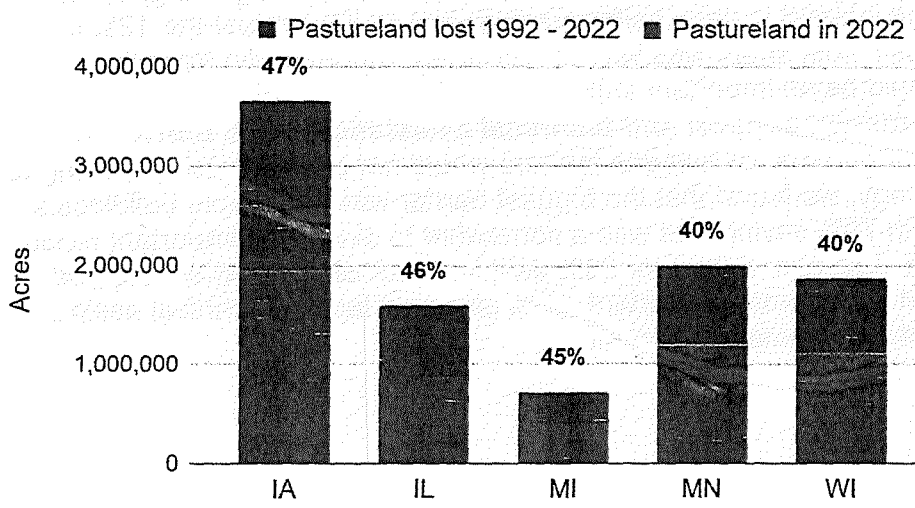
My research focuses on how policy can help private landowners in forestry and agriculture produce food and fiber in sustainable ways. I served as the policy team lead on the Grassland 2.0 project which is a collaborative project funded by USDA for producers, researchers, and public and private sector folks to develop pathways for grassland-based agriculture. This is designed to increase profitability, production stability, and nutrient and water efficiency while improving water quality, soil health, biodiversity, and climate resiliency.

We have learned what it takes to transition to grazing through over 130 interviews, several workshops, and a survey of Wisconsin dairy farmers. Our findings show growing support for enhancing profitability, sustainability, and community well-being through increased adoption of managed grazing. However, we found significant barriers such as up-front capital requirements for cost-share, inadequate infrastructure, and insufficient resources to facilitate a transition to perennial grass-based agriculture.

Thank you for the chance to share some of what we learned. I also want to give a shout out to the farmers who have fed us along the way. This morning, I poured milk from grass-fed cows in my coffee.

Pasture is declining in Wisconsin

Wisconsin had 1.1 million acres of non-woodland pasture in 2022, a decline of 40% over 30 years from 1.9 million acres in 1992.



Percent of non-woodland pasture lost across the Upper Midwest between 1992 and 2022.
Source: USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service, Agricultural Census 1992, 2022.

We heard from many producers in interviews that financial and technical assistance was critical for helping them get started with grazing. It can be expensive to put up fences and install pipes for water before cows or sheep are even out on the land, much less turning a profit. Technical assistance is critical and sometimes limited, as there can be long waiting periods to get a grazing management plan. We also heard concerns with federal programs like EQIP that they were oversubscribed, time consuming to get started, and had extensive paperwork. We've seen from the example of the producer-led watershed program that state efforts can serve an important role in allowing for fast, flexible, and innovative actions, even if they provide less overall funding than federal programs. We heard how those programs are crucial for farmers to learn from each other, creating a space for sharing innovations.

Dairy farmer survey results

I worked with a group of economists and other social scientists at UW River Falls and UW Madison to survey dairy farmers in winter 2023. We heard from 660+ farmers with a 33% response rate, which is a relatively high response rate for farmer mail surveys these days. These results show the perspectives of one pathway into managed grazing, in which an existing dairy or livestock farmer transitions into rotational grazing. The other is that a new farmer starts off grazing from the get-go, and their perspectives are not included here.

We learned that 82% of survey respondents do not already practice management intensive rotational grazing, which means moving cows every 4 days or more often. From those not already rotationally grazing:

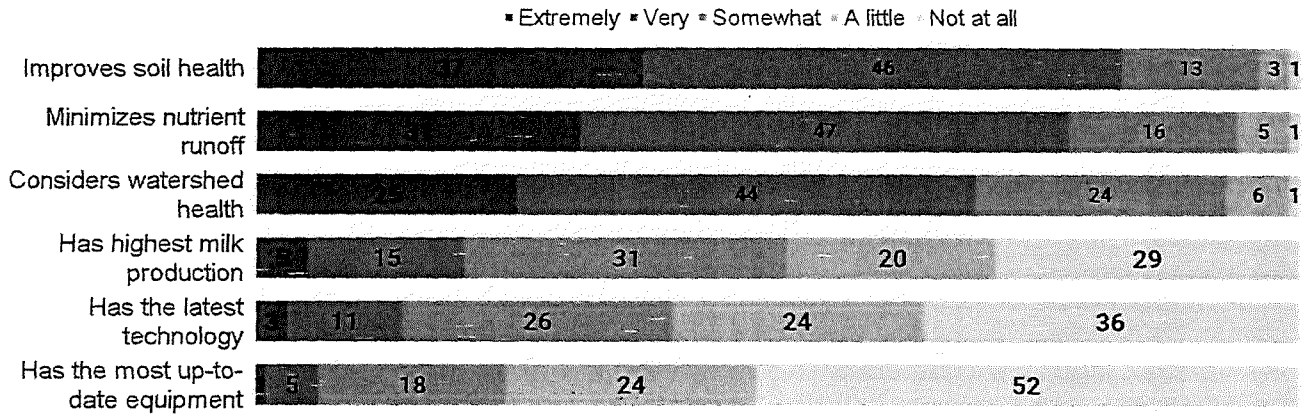
- **Cost sharing would be helpful for some dairy farmers to help support their transition to managed grazing.** 38% of dairy farmers who do not rotationally graze said that cost sharing would be somewhat to extremely important for helping support their use of managed grazing with their dairy animals. We recognize that most dairy farmers won't transition to rotational grazing, but we've seen a growing interest in dairy heifer grazing, and so if even just the 12% of farmers who said cost share was very to extremely important did transition to grass, that would be an important shift.
- **Lack of government support and technical assistance was a barrier.** When we asked about barriers, or reasons farmers would not consider using grazing as a feeding strategy, we found that the biggest barrier was unsuitable buildings and equipment, with 75% saying that was a somewhat to extremely important reason for not grazing. Just over a third, or 36% said that lack of government support was somewhat to extremely important. 36% also said lack of technical assistance was somewhat to extremely important.

More broadly, we asked existing dairy farmers their views on water quality and policy. We know that many farmers and organizations are working to improve agricultural management and sustain well-managed grazing operations to reduce runoff and leaching of phosphorus and nitrogen into the waters and wells of Wisconsin. Here's what we learned:

- **Water quality and soil health matter to farmers.** 83% of farmers emphasized the importance of enhancing soil health and 78% stressed the need to minimize nutrient runoff.
- **Protecting soil and water are more important for being a "good farmer" than having the highest milk production.** The majority said it is very-to-extremely important for a good farmer to improve soil health (83 percent) and minimize nutrient runoff (78 percent). Less than a quarter said it is very-to-extremely important to have the highest milk production (20 percent) or the latest technology (14 percent).
- **Dairy farmers support payments for water quality overall.** More than half, or 53 percent, of farmers supported paying farmers for improved water quality outcomes, while 14 percent opposed this.

Soil health and water quality are very important for being a good farmer

% saying how important each of the following is to be "a good farmer"...



Source: Survey conducted January-March 2023
Rissman, Fochesatto, and Lu (2023) Wisconsin Dairy Farmer Perspectives on Water Quality

In conclusion, our research finds that Wisconsin is losing pasture acres and the year-round roots they keep in the soil. We saw a decline in state and federal funding for prescribed grazing at the end of the Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative around 2012. Well-managed grasslands, savannas, and other forms of perennial agriculture are presently underutilized. Farmers face significant barriers to adoption in terms of financial and technical assistance. This presents an opportunity for Wisconsin to pioneer a nimble, lower-paperwork approach that complements existing programs and aims to achieve farmer profitability, grow rural communities, keep water clean, build soil health and retain soil carbon, revitalize wildlife and pollinator habitat and biodiversity, and produce high-quality milk and meat.

MICHAEL FIELDS
AGRICULTURAL INSTITUTE

Testimony of Chuck Anderas, MFAI Associate Policy Director

Public Hearing, Assembly Committee on Agriculture, April 8, 2025

The Michael Fields Agricultural Institute (MFAI) is a non-profit organization helping rural and urban farms and agricultural communities in Wisconsin and beyond be environmentally, economically, and socially healthy. Founded in 1984 in East Troy, Wisconsin, it is our mission to nurture the ecological, social and economic resilience of food and farming systems through education, research, policy, and market development. We work closely with beginning and experienced farmers across the state and nation. Our long history of working with farmers transitioning to managed grazing includes serving as Collaborator for the Uplands Farmer-Led Watershed Group in southwest Wisconsin.

MFAI supports many conservation practices as a way to achieve water quality goals and strong farm businesses, and managed grazing systems stand out as profitable, practical, and optimal for conservation outcomes. We appreciate the Legislature's leadership on grazing, and we wholeheartedly support AB118 to create the **Transition to Grazing Pilot Program**.

Well-managed grazing represents an opportunity for healthy communities, profitable businesses, and thriving ecosystems. Grazing promotes the vitality of Wisconsin's communities, economy, and natural resources. To see more grazing on the landscape, Wisconsin's agricultural community needs grazing technical assistance, education, and research as well as investments in marketing, processing, and supply-chain development. This bill contributes to all those critical aspects of moving grazing forward in Wisconsin.

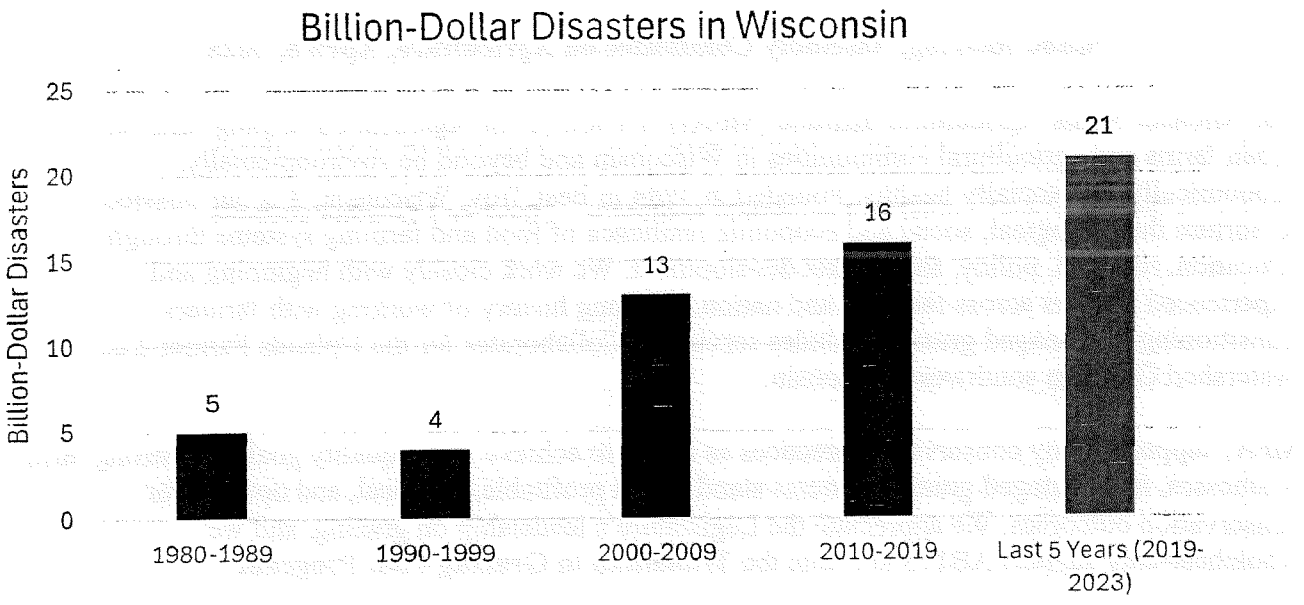
Well-managed grazing is critically important for:
-Restoring healthy rural communities and farmer livelihoods
-Improving water quality, soil, carbon, wildlife, and pollination benefits
-Reducing flood risk, soil runoff, and well contamination
-Meeting the rapidly increasing consumer demand for grass-fed products
-Providing opportunities for beginning and young farmers

MFAI is asking for your vote to pass AB118 out of committee, we hope to see a vote on the Assembly floor soon, and for the program to be funded in the 2025-2027 budget. For more information, please contact Chuck Anderas, Associate Policy Director at Michael Fields Agricultural Institute: (608) 358-6614 or canderas@michaelfields.org.

Sincerely,

Chuck Anderas

Michael Fields Agricultural Institute, Inc.
N8030 Townline Road, P.O. Box 990
East Troy, WI 53120
Phone: (608) 358-6614 Fax: (262) 642-4028
https://www.michaelfields.org/



Source: https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/access/billions/state-summary/WI

Michael Fields Agricultural Institute, Inc.
N8030 Townline Road, P.O. Box 990
East Troy, WI 53120
Phone: (608) 358-6614 Fax: (262) 642-4028
https://www.michaelfields.org/

Sauk County Testimony on AB655

Good morning! My name is Serge Koenig and I have been a conservationist at Sauk County for the past 30 years. I am excited to testify in support of the "Transition to Grass Pilot Program" Bill before you today. In my department, we work with farmers and rural landowners to install conservation practices that protect our land and water resources. Traditionally, our department was focused on installing "hard" practices such as concrete barnyards and manure storages. However, over the years, many dairy operations sold their herds and converted to cash grain operations and no longer had a need for "hard" practices to be installed on their farms. Having built the relationships and knowing that many of these retired dairy farmers still had an interest in raising livestock, we made a concentrated effort to reach out to them to assist them with converting their land to rotationally grazed pasture. We emphasized the financial and social benefits that come with rotational grazing. These were selling points the farmers were very interested in, and we knew on the back end, there would be environmental benefits that came along for the ride - increased soil health, increased organic matter and carbon storage, increased infiltration and therefore reduced runoff, and lower fertilizer needs. Our efforts are paying off - since 2017, our department has helped convert 5,400 acres to rotational grazing in SAUK County. We don't have any magic spells in Sauk County that helps producers adopt rotational grazing. It takes people in the trenches like I have been doing for 3 decades knocking on doors, connecting with landowners and building trust that then helps grazing adoption. The timeline and process for converting land into rotational pasture is not linear nor is it simple and requires assistance from land conservation professionals who understand cost share program implementation and technical aspects of establishing pasture systems.

I am regularly called upon by other land conservation professionals to share my knowledge of this process. But, not everyone has someone like me or an Extension livestock educator in their office or county. So, there is a need statewide for assistance with rotational grazing and having a position at the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection is essential. This position could not only help with the initial implementation of the grazing system but also serve as a resource in subsequent years as the operation starts to take off and encounters hurdles or obstacles that come along with changing a major aspect of their farm.

And that's what I've done over the years...help with overcoming those obstacles and being available to these farmers who are making a huge change on their farms and in their livelihoods. I have spent countless hours at the kitchen tables, barns and in the fields listening to producers in my attempt to better understand them, their families and their operations. If you could hear the stories I've heard over the past 30 years of my career and heard the anguish in the voices of our farmers, VOTING FOR THIS BILL WOULD SEEM LIKE LOW HANGING FRUIT. These things can only be witnessed in the trenches. It's from this place of understanding that I attempt to move the conversation towards conservation, particularly towards converting their landscape to perennial vegetation that holds their soil and nutrients in place and allow water to soak into the

ground rather than running off causing flooding issues downstream.....washing out roads, culverts, bridges..... We talk through the changes they can expect from a working environment, quality of life, animal and human health, and birds and pollinator standpoint. We also discuss the financial implications of converting their land to pasture. Preserving and improving the environment is great but if our producers are not profitable then it's not sustainable. The proposed bill would fill in gaps that traditional conservation programs cannot address. People come to grazing at different times throughout the year and their careers. Having another funding source would accelerate the adoption of rotational grazing throughout Wisconsin. Providing grazing payments to producers for years 2 and 3 after practice installation would help smooth out the financial transition to managed grazing because it's an entire systems change on farms. The funding source would also provide the training infrastructure needed to bring new conservationists up to speed on grazing and how to increase adoption.

Thank you for taking the time to hear from me today. I have been trying to give you a view of things from the countryside, from the trenches. This bill helps alleviate the anguish I regularly witness with our producers, especially now given the current climate. I appreciate the bipartisan efforts made to bring this bill forward and strongly encourage you to support it. I have seen firsthand the financial, social, and environmental benefits of rotational grazing and I want others to experience that too. Thank you.