

wisconsin grass-fed beef cooperative

WISCONSIN
MEADOWS™

100% Grass-fed Beef

Meadow View

Volume 9, Issue 2 • April, 2018

Welcome to the spring edition!

If you are getting this in the mail but do have an e-mail address, please let us know. We'll save on printing costs, and you will get better and more frequent communications from WGBC.

We welcome your feedback or questions, as well as contributions of articles or photos, upcoming grazing events or news from your part of the state. Send to: moreinfo@wisconsgrassfed.coop or to our mailing address:

P.O. Box 269, Viroqua, WI 54665

Phone: 1-800-745-9093 (Rod)

www.wisconsgrassfed.coop

www.wisconsinmeadows.com

Rod and Pete presented member awards at the annual meeting to Vince Hundt of Coon Valley and Laura Paine of Columbus.

Our thanks to Kevin Moore

Kevin stepped down from the board this year after two terms (2012–2017.)

In our meetings he was always positive, thoughtful and helpful, volunteering for extra work on various committees.

Kevin is especially appreciated for assisting with our website and writing the member profiles and taking farm photos for the newsletter (we are hopeful he will still do that between his travels!)

On behalf of the WGBC's board and membership Kevin, we thank you for your years of service!

Russ Endres, President
WGBC board of directors

GM's Message – You Can Rely on Your Cooperative

If you are watching conventional beef prices closely, the roller coaster of ups and downs is enough to make you dizzy. It sure makes our cooperative model look attractive in comparison. We don't chase conventional price swings, but rather attempt to be the faithful "go-to" option when you look at markets to sell your finished fat cattle. Our commitment of a "20% premium to conventional pricing" looks even more attractive when cattle futures drop nearly 10% in the span of a few weeks. Our pricing on the contrary has remained steady throughout the ups and downs. When considering shipping to the WGBC, also be sure you account for other benefits like our support of trucking costs, and patronage payments. The more cattle you send to the WGBC, the more you earn!

Best regards, Rod Ofte
WGBC General Manager



2018 Annual Meeting

About 70 members and guests attended the annual meeting Feb. 10th at the Wintergreen Resort in the Dells! The morning was spent getting info on the co-op's business for 2017 and plans for the year ahead. The board election was held, and member Brett Danke of Wausau was elected to the seat vacated by Kevin Moore. Awards were presented to Producer of the Year Vince Hundt, and Members of the Year Laura and Bill Paine. A lunch buffet of grass-fed burgers and fixin's was prepared for the members.

The afternoon educational sessions, included a Q&A from four of our top producers with a history of cattle finishing success, so we could learn and share tips with each other and improve our beef quality. Next, member Jim Munsch spoke about record-keeping (labor, inputs, etc.) for our operations and understanding the key financials to measure and improve your farm's success.

Attendees took home a case of their choice of Wisconsin Meadows 1# burger or hot dogs. The meeting was capped off by a happy hour to give folks time to visit with fellow co-op members. The chef at Wintergreen once again served up some delicious appetizers made with our beef.

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Farmer Profile – Dale Gasser

Dale Gasser and Judy Fossen are among the newest Co-op members. Their farm is 350 acres in Sauk County with 50 acres of pasture, 30 acres of hay, 125 acres of crop land rented to a neighbor and the rest woods. They have a cow-calf operation with 15 Black Angus cows but Dale said he now believes his cows are too big for the terrain on his farm. He has always had Black Angus but has begun crossing with Aberdeen seeking a smaller framed cow. He said he has tried AI with limited success and is currently using a halter-trained 3/4 Aberdeen bull.

Dale is a fourth generation farmer. His day job is as a Nonpoint Source Coordinator for the DNR covering 11 counties in south central and southwestern Wisconsin. He works with the ag performance standards related to runoff working mainly with county land conservation departments. He works with enforcement in cases where there is manure overflow into a creek or someone is spreading where they shouldn't and there's a fish kill. He also works with farmer led groups throughout the region. He said "A number of groups have started up that are doing a lot of good work where instead of the government setting the bar, the farmers themselves are saying let's do this, this works for us and we try to help them along." He works with grant programs like runoff management grants, grants for municipalities to do storm water planning and storm water construction, grants for farmers for notice of discharge and targeted runoff management grants for farming issues affecting surface or ground water quality.

His partner, Judy Fossen, is an independent marketing communications writer. Her company is Lumen Communications LLC and she works with manufacturing clients like Milwaukee Valve, as well as dairy ag and non-profit land trust clients.

Dale's father bought the home farm in 1949. He described how his father was "really ahead of the game." His father bought another farm a couple of miles east where he installed a double-8 herringbone milking parlor in '72, put in a Slurrystore system in '73 and a year or two later was using a Total Mixed Ration (TMR) system. Dale said his dad is 94, still gets up in the tractor and mows more hay than he does.

Dale said when he started raising cattle 20 years ago, the first couple of years he finished on grain and

*WGBC members
Dale Gasser and
Judy Fossen
on their
Sauk County
farm in March*



sold direct as all natural. He admitted it was "a lot of work." He continued calving in February / March, weaning in October, starting them on grain and selling them at the livestock exchange. He said he "hadn't finished steers in a long time and never on grass".

Two years ago Dale switched to a management intensive grazing system with water lines to every paddock. He converted 32 acres of cropland into pasture because he was running out of grass by end of summer. He worked with Serge Koenig at the Sauk County Land Conservation Department who helped him figure out how many cows his pasture could carry. In April of last year he worked with Southwest Badger RC&D and Cutler Fencing to host a landowner workshop on how to design and build high-tensile fences. He worked with Justin Morris at the NRCS with plans to start using cover crops. This is the second winter he's done winter bale grazing. Dale said last year was the first year his calves didn't have scours because they weren't in the barnyard.

Dale and Judy got involved in grazing through seminars and field days sponsored by the county and other organizations like Grassworks. Sauk County has helped promote grass fed and converting crop land to pasture with tools like a spreadsheet that can show what you make from a 40-acre field on corn or beans versus what you can make on grass-fed cattle. Dale said, "A lot of my work dovetails because the farmer led groups are all about improving soil health because it helps their bottom line. If you improve your soil health, your infiltration rates improve and have a lot



farmer profile continued from page 2 ...

less run off. Management intensive grazing is excellent for soil health. Cover crops are excellent for soil health. If you can do cover crops after the primary crop and then graze cattle on it, it really accelerates the benefits. Cattle on land managed properly is a win/win.”

Going forward he would like to reduce the amount of hay he’s using by increasing the amount of grazing land and stockpiling winter feed to extend the grazing season and eventually stop making hay. He said he has considered selling all the hay equipment and buying the hay he needs to get rid of the stress of watching the weather forecast looking for a 3-day window to make hay. He said “Ideally I would like to get down to feeding hay only 1 or 2 months over the winter.” He also would like to “add handling facilities at the main farm for sorting so that if I need to sort out anybody instead of having a rodeo I can run them through the chute into 3 separate pens and you’re done.” He also said he’d like to give AI another try and not have to keep a bull.

Judy said they enjoy going to all the grass-fed events, the conferences, pasture walks, workshops and classes. She talked about how an important part of these events is the networking and getting farmers to talk to each other, exchange information and resources, and develop relationships. And with fewer farms there’s more isolation for people who are farming, so networking is important to make sure these smaller farms don’t disappear, and to make the kids want to come back and farm because it’s an enjoyable life.

Thanks to co-op member Kevin Moore for our farmer profiles!



This delicious Hangar Steak Salad is from La Merenda in Milwaukee. See page 5 to read more about the special dinner there in March that featured our beef!

Beef Checkoff Compliance

The Beef Checkoff Program is a producer-funded marketing and research program designed to increase domestic and/or international demand for beef.



This can be done through promotion, research and new product development, and a variety of other marketing tools. (Similar to the “Got Milk?” campaign funded by the Dairy Checkoff.) Research shows the checkoff returns more than \$11 to the industry for every dollar invested.

The Cattlemen’s Beef Board and USDA oversee the collection and spending of checkoff funds.

By law, all producers selling cattle or calves, for any reason and regardless of age or sex, must pay \$1 per head to support beef/veal promotion, research and information through the Beef Promotion and Research Act, enacted in 1985. The buyer generally is responsible for collecting \$1 per head from the seller, but both are responsible for seeing that the dollar is collected and paid.

Whoever makes payment to the seller is considered a “Collection Point” or person and must withhold \$1-per-head, remitting those funds to the Qualified State Beef Council (QSBC) where they live. Collection points could include auction markets, feedyards, dealers/order buyers, other producers, auctioneers, clerking services, banks, packers and other entities.

Many of us have received the annual letter and do send in the fee depending on how many head we sold that year. The WGBC board is currently discussing collecting and paying the fee for our producers for any head that are sold through the co-op. Private treaty sales such as buying feeders or breeding stock would still be the individual producers’ responsibility.

See www.beefboard.org for more info.

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in Chicagoland!!**

*Let your Chicago-area friends and family know
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Local Foods • Fresh Market Place**

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Pete's Pricing and Production Page

The first quarter of 2018 is history – it's hard to believe. It's been a busy meeting, conference and promotion show season. Any of you with farm direct or other marketing experience realize – selling product is hard work.

From a cattle production perspective our supply and demand stability has been more elusive than past years.

On the farm side – challenges included a couple brutal cold snaps – probably impacting animal condition and weight gains. Overall, finish weights have been steady, *however* grading results reflect the importance of our animal's "energy" and environmental requirements during periods of high stress.

Demand/Supply – Demand for finished cattle and your co-op's marketing efforts are impacted by another set of challenges. Maintaining steady product sales with established accounts and outlets is definitely never a "put it in cruise control" scenario. Balancing whole animal product utilization with hired distribution product flows *and* launching a household/delivered "boxed beef" sales effort *and* trying to develop a Chicago delivery route challenges our best weekly cattle shipment forecasts!

It should not go without saying – thank you to those members who "ride" with our product sales swings around cattle shipments recognizing and accepting the needs of growing our cooperative business.

Prices Raised – Your board of directors approved an increase in pay prices effective April – see price outline. The concept of sale results supporting increased pay prices applies. A generally solid co-op sales/profit outlook so far in 2018 – supported a call to reward member producers steadily marketing their finished animal production with WGBC. This, along with the revised tiered pricing, patron bonus incentives, and patron dividend history – offers a great option for member farms marketing with WGBC.

Shipping Schedule – As spring / summer arrives we will have a steady call for fat animals. The grill season normally increases demand for trim products (culls) and we are doing our best to work through plentiful cull cow supplies offered from member farms. Once again, it is a balancing act to preserve wholesale pricing of trim products – without reducing the value of the "usual" quantity of trim products from fat animal processing.

Wishing you all the best for the upcoming spring season of warming soils and the resulting tasks coming with them!!

Happy Grazing! Pete Prochnow –
WGBC Production Manager
pete@wisconsingrassfed.coop
or: 920-210-9177

Carcass Grade	Marbling Score (points)	Tier Number	Price / Lb. (hanging wt.)
Choice	0 – 90	T 1	\$2.45
Select	50 – 90	T 2	\$2.35
Select	30 – 40	T 3	\$2.25
Select	0 – 20	T 4	\$2.15
Select	0 pts/Standard/Cull*	T 5	\$1.30

(all per pound, carcass weight)

*Call if you have cull cows to send, we will advise if/when needed.

The following producer incentives remain unchanged:

- Transport cost assistance stays @ \$0 for first 50 miles and \$10 every 50 miles after – per head.
- Patron Bonus – After individual member farms ship 12 head, subsequent (starting with #13) animals shipped receive an additional \$.10 / lb – all price tiers – for the remainder of the same calendar year.

Pastured Pork Producer Input Wanted !!

The WGBC is conducting a small scale trial of pastured pork to three of our existing customers. If you are currently a WGBC member in good standing, and also raise pork, please give me a call to share your opinion on a raising protocol. If our trial is successful, we will need existing producers to build and finalize an official protocol that we can adopt and publish.

Our current basic position is that all pork marketed will have had no confinement, no antibiotics, and be fed non-GMO feeds. Your input on animal welfare and other policies would be helpful, in addition to acceptable pricing.

Please call Rod @ 608-451-2861 with your thoughts.



A Reminder of Why We Do What We Do

Thanks to WGBC board VP Jon Lee for this report and photos!

The Wisconsin Grass-fed Beef team just finished a whirlwind tour of Madison and Milwaukee stores and restaurants. Like all of our partners, these are important relationships that make our co-op strong. A store demo is exhausting and refreshing at the same time. You are on your feet for a few hours engaging customers – at the same time having them sample Wisconsin Meadows meats. This is important because our customers now know our brand. They are faithful buyers; they are educated buyers. I always come away from these store demos with a renewed sense of why we do what we do. Customers thank us, and they ask pertinent questions at every turn. The customers more importantly, value knowing where their meat is coming from. And, they don't forget about the taste either! This only helps our cause. Doing demos in stores is not hard, you just need a willingness to share your farm story and the benefits of grazing one-on-one with our customers. It really helps consumer loyalty to meet our farmers. Please consider doing one in the near future. You will be glad you did.

While in Milwaukee working the Midwest Foodservice Expo – Wisconsin Restaurant Association Show I was able to speak to hundreds of people about our unique product. Some were chefs, restaurant owners, store managers, consumers and there were even a few people from Asia that were interested in grass-fed beef. Each day, attendees were able to sample our wonderful products. These samples are always a hit. Our beef jerky is always a favorite too.

We have an important partnership with a great restaurant in Milwaukee called La Merenda. For several years now they have been catering to customers who value local. I was privileged to be served beef that came from my own farm in March. The Wisconsin Meadows Grass-fed Beef dinner was a five course meal. Over 60 people paid \$100 a plate to enjoy WGBC beef and network with co-op representatives. The meal was great. The people in attendance were truly appreciative of what we do and many asked where they could get our product. All of these networking opportunities only help our brand and cause. We should all be proud of what we do. Local is important. Let's keep it that way.



At left: the chef at La Merenda in Milwaukee, prepares Veal Carpaccio as part of the special Wisconsin Meadows dinner in March. Also served was NY Strip (right), Osso Bucco, Hangar Salad, and Beef Tongue Tostadas (shown below)



Member share buy-back – when WGBC was formed in 2008, it was set up with 200 member shares available for purchase. With just over 185 members 10 years later, in order to encourage active producers to join, the co-op will buy back your share certificate for the \$200 par value. Shares can only be bought from, or sold to, the cooperative. If you no longer farm, or wish to cancel your membership, contact the co-op secretary Greg Nowicki.

Upcoming Events *(blue text indicates events the co-op is sponsoring or attending)*

Pasture Walks, SW Wisc.

For more info, please contact: *Cynthia Olmstead*,
info@kickapoograzinginitiative.com | 608-606-6022

May 1, 10:30 am – 26343 Bernard Rd., Eastman
Guest Speaker: Dr. Erin Silva, UW Dept. of Plant Pathology on Research: Winter Rye as a cover crop for grazing.

June 10:30 am – 12241 State Hwy 27, Ferryville
Progress on developing new dairy cattle lanes on rolling topography using EQIP.

Nitty Gritty Craft Beer Week

Pairing with WM burgers
May 7–10, three Madison area locations

R.E.A.P. Burgers & Brew

June 2–3, Middleton

Madison Area Sampling Demos

June 2, Madison area retailers *(contact Rod to help out!)*

SAVE THE DATE!



July 19th, Cavern Point Farm WGBC 10th Anniversary Picnic

M431 Drake Ave. Marshfield, WI 54449
Tie-in with GrassWorks summer picnic – bring your whole family and join us on Thursday, July 19 from 10 am to 4 pm *(lunch provided by WGBC)*

RSVP to Jason Cavadini by July 12th. 715-650-7451
or: jason.cavadini@wisc.edu This year's event also features an optional early-bird tour of the Marshfield Agricultural Research Station.



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