

wisconsin grass-fed beef cooperative

WISCONSIN
MEADOWS™

100% Grass-fed Beef

Meadow View

Volume 10, Issue 3 • July 2019

2nd Quarter 2019 – WGBC General Manger’s Update

It is a great time to be a member of the Wisconsin Grass-fed Beef Co-op. 2019 has us growing 23% above this time period last year and profitable.

Despite having nearly 200 sustainable family farm members, our biggest challenge to growth in the mid-term is getting enough cattle to supply our expanding customer base. If you have friends that are looking for a secure market for their 100% grass-fed fat cattle, please send them our way. Despite turbulent times in the cattle business, fluctuating hay markets and agriculture in general, our cooperative is still offering a 20% premium to conventional beef and actively seeking more members with fat cattle for sale.

2019 has shown significant returns on our efforts to gain traction in the Chicago market. We are now present at 7 retail stores and three restaurants. The market is massive with still plenty of room to grow. A number of positive initial customer meetings in the Minneapolis area will lead to and increased Wisconsin Meadows presence there by this fall.

In 2019 we launched the “Wisconsin Meadows Pastured Pork” program. Despite modest goals in our first year, the product is doing well in the marketplace and selling at nearly double the rate that we had forecast. This alternative protein, with our unique “pasture” positioning, should be a solid leg of a prospering business for years to



Grillmaster Jon Lee of Coon Valley, cookin' up our delicious products at the Thursday night grilling events at the Viroqua Food Co-op. Thanks Jon for volunteering your time to support WGBC farms!

come and allow our diverse family farm members one more outlet for the animals they raise.

Thanks to all of our members who have volunteered to support a customer sampling event or product demonstration. We understand that the time commitment to do things like this is very demanding, but the positive returns to the co-op and our brand are incredibly important. These opportunities to interact with the public solidify our relationships with consumers, and strengthen our partnerships with

customers. If you have not supported one of these events, and are interested to try it, please email or contact me (*we can team you up with a veteran first time out if you like.*) Recent events include product sampling at all Willy Street and Metcalfes stores in Madison. We were the “Farmer Partner” of choice at this year’s annual “Burgers and Brew” Festival in Madison where we were chosen three to one over other farm direct options. The Viroqua Food Co-op has also been featuring us as their preferred protein provider and spotlighted our products in their grand re-opening events in May.

Our annual Strategy and Planning Meeting is coming up in September. The management team and board of directors come together to review current year results and to plan a path for our future. As a member owned cooperative, your voice is important. If you have new ideas or are passionate about something you think will improve our business, please feel free to share the idea with me or one of our board members. Even better, run for the board yourself and take part in the leadership firsthand.

Hope you are all having a great summer and that your forages are plentiful!! Best regards,

Rod Ofte,
WGBC General Manager
608-451-2861

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Reconsidering Summer Plans

Farming in the best of times is challenging, cost of feed and inputs change, value of our product also rises and falls, as does demand from our consumers. On top of all this is weather, and season to season variations, this is the big wild card we don't control and can only adjust our plans.

After a hard winter, we had many acres of winter kill, late-planted wheat struggled and now a cool wet spring has delayed crop planting, hay establishment and harvest. To top it all off, we enter spring with some of our lowest forage supplies in years resulting in high hay costs, a condition likely to continue into 2019/2020.

In March and April as we consider what spring "might" bring, lots of discussion focused on warm season annual forages as an emergency or supplement forage, things like sudan grass, millet, teff grass, etc. What's not to like, we can plant these crops when soil temperatures are 60 degrees, they grow well in summer, seed is very affordable, and they can be grazed and/or harvested for stored feeds.

But here's the thing – these species really like heat, more heat than corn. Current weather data from Arlington has 2019 as being the 3rd coolest and 7th wettest in the past 30 years. For Marshfield, it is *the* coolest and the 7th wettest.

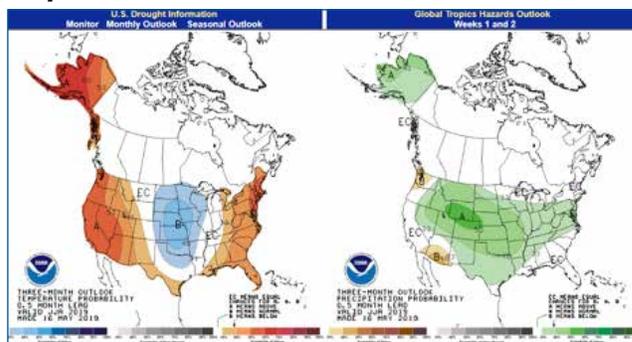
The question we need to be asking ourselves is what's the weather going to bring the rest of this summer season?

We are still under a weak El Niño, which is when the ocean waters along the equatorial Pacific are above normal temperatures for three consecutive months. This frequently results in milder and wetter weather pattern for the upper Midwest. Our last El Niño was 2015. Producers who planted warm season annuals that summer grew far less forage than in other years with hotter and drier conditions.

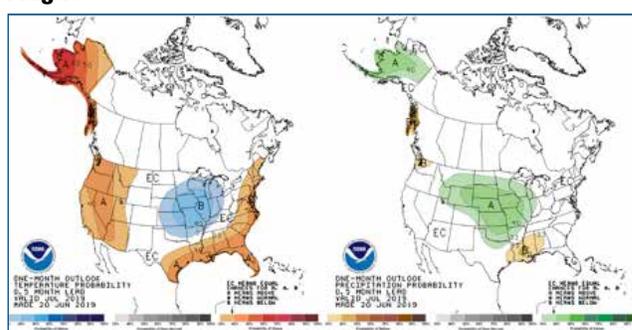
The folks at NOAA predict what they think might happen. These are probability models based on similar conditions in the past.

(see <https://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/>)

July



August



July and August are the critical months for warm season forage growth, *if* these months are cooler than normal we won't get normal yield. Depending upon what *you* think the weather will do, we might consider some Italian ryegrass instead. *If* it stays cool and wet, these are great conditions for our cool season forages, this excellent growth may result in plants using up the available pool of soil nitrogen. *If* we don't have adequate legumes in our pasture, (<50%) *then* I might consider adding some supplemental nitrogen to the pastures in early August to stimulate more fall growth, this can be from fertilizer or composted manure. The August application, with a bit of rain, returns nearly 20 pounds of forage for every pound of actual N.

What's it gonna do? Check with me at Labor Day.

Gene Schriever
WGBC Board Member



Join us for the GrassWorks and WGBC Annual Picnic and Pasture Walk



Host:
Bouressa Family Farm
N3775 Ritchie Rd
New London, WI 54961
www.bouressafamilyfarm.com

In partnership with:
Wisconsin Farmers Union
Organic Valley / CROPP

Thursday, July 18th
11:00 am – 4:00 pm

11:00-12:30: Walk the farm! Bouressa Family Farm is a small (but growing) direct-market, grass-fed beef operation. Rachel has worked with NRCS, through the EQIP program, and attributes this to her success.

12:30 – 2:00: Enjoy a picnic feast **sponsored by Wisconsin Meadows and Organic Valley!** The following food will be provided: hotdogs, chocolate and whole milk, and cheese graciously donated by our sponsors. We'll be giving updates on our organization, sharing upcoming events, and thanking our sponsors.

2:00 – 4:00: Live MUSIC and networking! We'll have a band sponsored by Wisconsin Farmers Union! Feel free to stroll around the farm or sit, enjoy the afternoon filled with great music and discussion.

Please bring your own lawn chairs. Bring your whole family.

RSVP BY JULY 14th to Rachel at 608-228-6617 OR bouressafamilyfarm@gmail.com to make sure we have enough Wisconsin Meadows and Organic Valley treats and paper supplies. You are still welcome to come after this date, but you might want to bring your own lunch.

A Discussion of Cattle Cost Data for the Co-op, 2016 to Present

Dear Members,

If there's a busier time of year than late spring / early summer – it's not obvious in 2019. A slow developing spring growing season on the heels of tight feed inventories in most of Wisconsin has kept heartburn tablets nearby. Pasture turnouts and spring planting efforts appear 2–4 weeks later than usual. All of which, spill into efforts to harvest early forage crops.

Discussions of climate change aside, as we commiserate about impacts of weather from year to year, our conclusions are usually based on previous events. Our progress (or lack of perceived progress) is often measured against markers, generated from either foggy memories and/or collected hard data. Both methods have merit – and shortcomings. Memories are impacted by attitudes and personal experience. Recorded data is interpreted or presented to make sense for a message or purpose – so source and motive should be qualified – i.e. disclaimers for figures provided below.

Most of your cooperative business decisions are largely based on financial activities generated from business accounting statements. These reported statements are viewed as priorities, since they are standardized and illustrate impacts on revenues – as such, reliable, reasonable to interpret, and important. Nonetheless, in an effort to focus on specific production or cost of goods sold (cattle purchases) a couple reports were recently generated with year-to-year comparisons for WGBC board review. The examples shared are summarized from the same data sources.

Three qualifiers:

- 1) Cost information for WGBC Pork sales is included in current business financials, but are not discussed here since our window of experience is so small.
- 2) WGBC's itemized costs of purchasing animals are generally collected to-date. To record more details/summaries for review would require more time

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investment. Note – only the actual purchase costs of animals are shown below. Quality tier price; avg. transport cost assistance; patron volume bonus payments; as purchase costs, are included, however not specifically noted.

- 3) Finally, keep in mind – when WGBC pays more for livestock – either our retail meat sale prices need to be increased *or your cooperative makes less profit*. As a member farm, higher pay prices are important, but if higher pay prices are maintained, the financial supports for your cooperative’s business development are sacrificed. It’s one of those pesky dilemmas where we try to keep both interests in balance.

Below are basic numbers breaking down WGBC’s cost of purchasing fat cattle in recent years.

Top to bottom the numbers appear to stay in sync – over time. Other than a significant increase in the number of animals shipped per month – carcass weights, cost/paid price/lb and cost of incentives – rise and fall reasonably during the time periods outlined. The purpose here, again is to provide basic markers or guides as reference points for future comparisons and business decisions.

More surprising, and from the WGBC “business perspective” it is interesting to note how much our expenses – when including all costs of purchasing our goods for sale (grass-fed beeves) – can vary month to month. When we include additional expense items like processing costs, carcass utilization, cut out or yield percentages, packaging, etc. it gets more complex in a hurry. All of these items impact our cooperative’s profitability *and* the ability to maintain premium pay prices for our member’s farm production. And notably – all this – before we even get to marketing issues, customers, competition, and distribution...

In an elementary review of 2018 month-to-month costs to get one animal’s beef products “sale ready” the average cost varied over \$500 per animal (when factoring in all direct expenses). The impact of pay prices applied to hanging weights certainly has an impact – but quality tier results, transport assistance, and patron volume bonus incentives vary significantly – yet equally impact our cost of purchased animals – as goods for sale. In the case of both – quality tier results, transportation assist, and yield percentage differences – we don’t know what they will be until logistics and grading reports are documented. In other words – after the fact and “on the rail”. Processing expenses and packaging decisions are more directly within WGBC’s control, however relatively tied to supply and demand issues between our processing/distribution partners and, eventually our customers.

One point to make here: in order for WGBC to maintain a ready market offering premium pay prices for live grass finished cattle from WGBC member farms – details matter. For example, when a farm can seasonally direct market live animals to customers through the local slaughter plant, such details may not seem as relevant and are mostly absorbed by the customer after your live or hanging weight price is negotiated. By comparison, the steady year-round member farm marketing choice WGBC makes available by accessing a broader customer base – the cost/expense details of managing your cooperative business are very relevant and important.

Hopefully, as WGBC members you appreciate the above efforts to share “quick bits” of our business operations. With a cooperatively owned business an ideal scenario is when member farms maintain a connection to business outcomes and the value of participating in our shared endeavor.

Pete Prochnow

Year / Time period	Average # of Beef Cattle Shipped / Month	Average Carcass Wt.	Average Price Pd. Fats (only)	Cost of Incentives Pd. / Animal **
2016 / 12 mos.	51 head	636.2 lbs	\$2.52	\$54.00
2017 / 12 mos.	64 head	643.9 lbs	\$2.39	\$59.00
2018 / 12 mos.	89 head	646.9 lbs	\$2.31	\$63.00
2019 ytd (May 7)	90 head	668.5 lbs	\$2.39	\$58.00

** Cost of Incentives Paid/Animal includes all Transportation Assistance and Patron Volume Bonuses (10 ¢/lb for all fat animals shipped after the initial 16 head from each member farm) applied to all animals purchased in the period noted.



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

**July 13, 10:00 am – Jim Jasek
Ryan Road near Co. Hwy CC, Couderay, WI**

Host Jim Jasek and family operate a cow/calf grass-fed beef herd on about 80 acres of pasture north of Couderay. Come see the recently constructed hoop hay storage shed, unique square bale feeding facility and recently developed silvopastures. The challenges to control understory regrowth in older silvopastures, economics of small square bale feeding, soil health issues and pasture clipping to control weeds will be discussed along with other topics.

The Jaseks rotationally graze about 60 head of beef from Hereford, Black Angus, and crosses that are marketed locally, primarily as feeders. They are experienced with silvopasture development and management, and grow over 100 acres of excellent grass hay. They started with a grazing plan developed over 10 years ago and have made improvements such as three-wire-high tensile fences. Jim also has built a hay bale feeding facility using a cement slab and fence line feeder panels. The Jaseks are building a hay storage facility this summer to switch to storing and feeding large round bales in the future. For more info, contact Lynn Johnson 715-268-8778 at NW Graziers

**July 18, 11:00 am – GrassWorks Summer Picnic,
New London, WI** *RSVP NOW! See inside for details*

**July 23, 6:30 pm – April Prusia, W8707 Sawmill Rd,
Blanchardville, WI.**

“Pigs’ don’t graze” April has been grazing her heritage hogs for 8 years, and estimates that up to 50% or more of the pigs diet can come from grazing during the green season, with the remainder as a grain supplement. April acknowledges there are some advantages to cross breeding but she has a focus on heritage breed preservation after starting with Large Blacks, she now has Gloucestershire Old Spots. Single strand electric polywire contains the pigs which are rotated through a series of temporary paddocks for the season. The marbled, ruby red meat is selling well directly to consumers and restaurants. This pasture walk will look at challenges to managing pigs to prevent rooting behavior, controlling parasites and pasture impact. As part of a USDA SARE grant, April and others have been reviewing the opportunity to develop a mobile processing unit for on-farm harvesting.

**July 27, 10:30 am – Ryan Studnicka,
1435 Blue River Rd., Muscoda, WI .**

Studnicka Cattle Company produces grass-fed beef. After a 2018 pasture walk and input from other grazers, Ryan divided each of his existing paddocks to create shorter occupancy periods improving utilization and keep nutrition on a higher level. In 2019 he converted some crops acres to grazing and is establishing pastures by broadcasting and interseeding a cover crop and pasture mix into growing corn at the V4 stage. This will be an opportunity to look at impact of a tight rotation, and an innovative method for establishing grazing on crop acres.

**August 3, 10am–2pm – Carney Family Farms
13602 NE 96th St. Maxwell, IA 50161**

One Family’s Vision for Agroforestry in Iowa.

Bruce Carney plants trees in his pastures to provide shade for livestock, but also to grow fruits and nuts as an extra farm enterprise that supports the family’s next generation of farmers. Bruce and Connie Carney produce and direct-market grass-fed and -finished cattle, hair sheep, pigs and poultry. Carney Family Farms is located on 300 acres of pasture that was once corn and soybean ground in central Iowa. This field day is focused on silvopasture and is co-hosted by Practical Farmers of Iowa and the Savanna Institute *RSVP for lunch (515) 202-7326*

...more events on next page.

Be sure to send us your late fall events for the October newsletter!

GREAT RIVER GRAZERS NO TILL DRILL

A reminder that GRG rents out a no till drill for farmers and landowners interested in establishing pasture.

Call Mike Bolan at: 608-734-3958.



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August 6, 1:00 pm – Mike and Matt Mueller, 748 Enloe Rd., Rewey, WI.

Mike and Matt have purebred Normande, Shorthorn and crossbreds and need to get creative to support their 400 beef cows. All calves not retained for breeding purposes are finished in a leased feedlot and sold on a grid, providing valuable carcass data on how their genetics perform. Farming on some of the best soil in Iowa County, their owned land is entirely seeded to pasture, ground that would otherwise grow 250 bushel corn. They also contract out with several area land owners to custom rotationally graze some of their cattle through summer. Their greatest challenges and limits to expansion are accessing more pasture that is reasonable close and pasture damage from out wintering cattle in Wisconsin as we transition through our mud season. Discussion will focus on whether grazing offers a better return than corn on high quality land and share ideas on how we're all dealing with spring mud.

August 13, 10:30 am – 12041 Severson Rd., Ferryville, WI Amy Fenn, 608-445-5592

Year 3: converting woods to silvopasture, designing a forage chain, & adding chickens for fly control. Hosted by Great River Graziers
info@kickapoograzinginitiative.com 608-606-6022.

August 27, 10:30 am – 18612 Halls Branch Rd Gays Mills, WI Eric Hammell Farm

Challenges and successes in using brush management techniques in pastures to improve forage quality and accessibility for cattle. Hosted by Great River Graziers
info@kickapoograzinginitiative.com 608-606-6022.

September 10, 10:30 am – 47644 Aspen Rd., Soldiers Grove, WI

Mike Lind will discuss silvopasture management (progress since last pasture walk in 2017) and also soil improvement/fertility issues. Hosted by Great River Graziers, 608-606-6022
co-sponsored by the Savanna Institute.

**The Savanna Institute has a list of agroforestry-focused events at:
<http://www.savannainstitute.org/events.html>**

Our Wisconsin Magazine

Did you see our ad that ran recently?
The co-op donated one of the magazine's prizes and Jon Lee recently received this note...

Hi Jon, thought you'd like to read the kind note that was sent to us. Your winner was generous with his prize and it appeared to be well-received!

Thanks so much!

Wendi Ell, Advertising Manager, Our Wisconsin Magazine

Subject: received wisc. meadows

Date: Thu, June 20, 2019 9:16 am

To: advertising@ourwisconsinmag.com

Thank you ...we received our Wisconsin Meadows prize...Johnson's beef jerky ...it is great ...took some to grandson's ball tournament to share ... everyone loved it ...and are going to try and order some for themselves ...thank you very much ...and please thank Wisc. Meadows for me. – Larry Thomas

Member participation in WGBC is vital!

Share your talents with our membership – articles, contributions of recipes or farm photos, upcoming grazing events or news from your part of the state is welcome for the newsletter, web site or our Facebook page. Don't forget the cattle and equipment buy & sell on the members' page of the web site can be posted by any member, or send to the address below and we will get it up there for you.

To contact someone at the Co-op, our e-mail address is: more.info@wisconsingrassfed.coop
or mail to: WGBC, Box 269 Viroqua, WI 54665.

We welcome your feedback or questions and will be sure to direct it to the appropriate staff or board member.