

Black & White, Keeping it Green

By Robert Weaver, Otsego Co. SWCD Contractor and NESARE grazing training participant

The Hershberger Farm is located in northern Otsego County, headwaters to both the Mohawk and Susquehanna River Basins. The Hershberger family along with their forty-five Holstein cows call this home.



In the fall of 2010, Isaac Hershberger approached the District and NRCS about rotational grazing of his Holstein cows. Grazing was a concept he felt very passionate about, but didn't really know where to start. Our journey to successful grazing began with a meeting at Isaac's kitchen table. We talked about cattle numbers, possible pasture locations, and general rotational grazing concepts. We discussed their farm and family goals, and how grazing objectives could help reach some of those goals. After all this, Isaac and I walked possible pasture sites. We bantered one another, like a couple of guys I know at the local diner, for over an hour. What might work, what wouldn't, what he liked, what I didn't etc. After all this high spirited conversation, I walked away with a sense of what Isaac was about and his vision of grazing cattle.

Taking all this information back to our office, we were able to determine soil types, field acreages, and potential forage availability for the numbers of cattle being grazed. From the PGM work sheets, it was calculated that Isaac did have enough pasture land to institute quality rotational grazing. With the help of NRCS, and all of Isaac's feedback, a grazing plan was formulated. A 30 paddock , 30 day rotation was proposed. We were fortunate enough to have the Graze New York Team review Isaac's plan, who added several good suggestions.

In the spring of this year, Isaac began grazing with a loaner fence program from the District. It soon became apparent that if Isaac was to be successful he would need water in each paddock and good perimeter fencing to control animal traffic; not to mention the cows getting out on a Sunday, prompted Isaac to action. The call was made, and E & A Fence LLC was soon on site constructing 16,000 ft. of hi-tensile fencing.

Getting water up hill and 1900 ft. from the farm's well was all Isaac's plan. He added an air booster pump to his existing system, and now has water to all his paddocks. No small feat considering it is all done without electricity.

When it comes to Isaac's grazing plan, our job at Soil & Water is far from complete. We will be out there working and learning along side Isaac during the next grazing season. When it comes to successful grazing; listening, being flexible, and willing to adjust are all key, to planner and farmer alike.