

2021 SARE Tri-State Grazing Workshops Follow- Up Interviews with Participants

Sixty persons participated in the four 2021 workshops. Ten persons were staff and presenters. Workshops were held on February 19, March 10, March 23, and April 6, 2021. Of the 50 participants, 23 were Agricultural Service Providers and 27 were farmers; several ASPs were also farmers. Thirteen (13) persons attended all 4 workshops; of these 6 were Asp and 7 were farmers. Fourteen (14) persons attended three of the 4 workshops. During interviews several of those who had missed one workshop reported that they had gone to the website to review the materials from the workshop they missed.

We reached out to all participants several times to ask them to participate in a telephone conversation about the workshops and what they had learned. Fourteen persons were interviewed; ten were farmers and 4 were Asp. (They represented 30% of the participants.) We were particularly interested in learning how they are using the info from the workshops or would in the future.

The overall response to each of our questions was very positive. Everyone agreed that the workshops met all expectations for the program and more.

“Every one of the workshops was a nugget; handouts were excellent; there were great networking opportunities; this was a great process.”

Everyone was very impressed with the presenters and their presentations. The presentations were specific and there was “not a lot of jargon.” They liked the length of each presentation and the use of breakout meetings. Workshops were more structured than they thought they might be, and that was a plus.

Using the Information from the Workshops:

Each of the 4 Asps stated that they would use the information in their work with farmers and that the workshops did give them information they needed to respond to questions, to reach out to farmers and to refer farmers to additional sources for help. Following the workshops they were much more aware of resources available from other sources, including NRCS. They have already shared information with other asp. They were now likely to raise issues about grazing when meeting with farmers for other reasons as well.

Both asp and farmers said they had received enough information from the workshops to develop their own grazing plans; some were adapting plans already in use. One farmer who has been doing rotational grazing of dairy cows for many years reported she has changed what she is doing as a result of what she learned.

When asked how they would like to get questions answered or receive more advice following up on these workshops, everyone said they would like on farm visits or one on one meetings but recognized that might not be possible.

Organization of the workshops and presentations:

Without exception everyone liked the virtual presentations and would like more in the future. They would also like live field workshops. It was much easier for persons not to have to travel to workshops and give up a whole day away from work and/or farm.

They liked the *shorter specific presentations and the breakout sessions*. Several said they wished that everyone would be on camera during the breakouts so that they “saw” each other more. One suggestion was that we require that in the future. We could have had more people in each individual breakout session to allow for different inputs. Only one person thought we should not have asp and farmers together in workshops; but that was because she was concerned with whether we were “wasting” farmers’ time. Most persons thought that the time between the different workshops was about right; enough to absorb what had been learned; but not to forget before the next session.

In summary, all wanted to continue virtual workshops but would also like live field workshops.

What would you like to learn from future workshops, 2022 and beyond:

- Revisit topics from workshops held in previous years—more to learn from them
- Training on how to get farmers to change their minds, to do things differently, especially about rotational grazing
- More about how to replant pastures and growing hay
- *Pasture management overall*
- Infrastructure – fencing, water systems, paddocks – pasture walks about infrastructure, especially fencing; designing watering systems
- Identification of sensitive places on the land

- Coordination of different species on pasture, especially different species on the same land: goats, pigs, poultry
- Agritourism
- Horse nettles
- Silvopasture
- Manure management
- Caring for sick animals, when to call on veterinarian

Anything else?

- Networking opportunities were excellent, several followed up to go to other virtual workshops
- Did not like when participants did put themselves on video in breakout sessions
- Training on how people learn
- Understanding of the ecosystem
- Regenerative agriculture
- Genetic selection