

Optimizing Forage Quality & Production:

Lessons in Sustainability

- The use of low persistence annuals, like forage rape, may not help you extend the grazing season when no-till seeded into light sod without the correct soil fertility.
- Extending the grazing season requires ample acreage for the size of the herd, 2-4 tons/acre of forage dry matter production, and good forage management.
- Restoring soil fertility to depleted farmland is expensive and time consuming.
- Applying manure in July, after mechanical harvest of hay or silage, will boost production for fall grazing.
- Repeated close clippings, twice per season, will control brush and allow favorable forage species to better respond to inputs.
- Delay expensive seeding until *after* you have assessed the response of native grasses and clovers to inputs and improved soil fertility. Seed only when necessary and spot seed sparse areas.
- Every penny counts in an operation with a narrow margin. Extending the grazing season is one small way to lower production costs.



● Days Extended:	42
● Daily Feed Cost:	\$9.76
● Savings:	\$410.00
● Pounds of Calf Weaned:	18,657lbs.
● Value Added to Calves:	\$0.02/lb.

Demonstrating the benefits of an extended grazing season

ST. JOHN VALLEY- In 2002, Dave and Dee Potter of the Mountain Ash Farm and Cattle Company in Frenchville received a Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Grant to explore methods of improving forage quality and production on depleted farmland in order to extend the grazing season. A workshop sponsored by the St. John Valley Soil and Water Conservation District, with support from the Northeast Region SARE and the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service EQIP Education Program, highlighting the goals, techniques, and outcome of this study, was held on Saturday, Oct. 16 at the Potter's farm, with participants arriving from throughout Aroostook County.

The original study initiated by Dave Potter sought to test and compare practices designed to extend the grazing season and improve quality and productivity on 36 acres of grassland, formerly depleted cropland. These practices consisted of no-till seeding forage rape (*brassicas*), a high quality, high yielding, fast growing crop suitable for grazing by livestock, into light sod; variously timed applications of lime, and both chicken and cow manures in order to restore depleted soil; the harvest or clipping of forages to control brush and allow favorable forage species to flourish; rota-

soil fertility. While the original study inevitably ran into a few road-blocks, such as an alteration in the proposed timing of soil inputs due to spring accessibility issues, and difficulty in establishing forage rape, Potter's study did yield some valuable information on how inputs and the timing, as well as seeding and harvesting, can greatly improve both forage quality and production, ultimately extending the grazing season.

Indeed, in a region where the average grazing season lasts a mere 140 days, compared to that of Virginia's potential 255 day grazing season, these are important points to consider. In 2002, for example, Potter grazed his livestock for a total of 161 days until Nov. 2, and in 2003, he grazed them 182 days until Nov. 23, without feeding a single bale of hay, or compromising the body condition of the cows. For 2004, Potter estimates his livestock will get 174 days of grazing in by Nov. 26.

So what does this translate to for the farmer and his livestock? For the livestock, it results in a much happier lifestyle; according to Potter, body condition of his cows actually improved with late season grazing. For the farmer, with an average daily feed cost of \$9.76, 42 days of extended grazing yields a savings of \$410. With 18,657 pounds of calf



WORKSHOP- The St. John Valley Soil and Water Conservation District, along with the Northeast Region SARE, and the USDA EQUIP Education Program sponsored a workshop earlier this month at the Mountain Ash Farm and Cattle Company in Frenchville. Participants from throughout the County heard about the goals, techniques and outcomes of a recent study by farmers Dave and Dee Potter on improving forage quality and production on depleted farmland.

-contributed photo

value of Potter's calves. In an operation with a narrow margin, every penny counts, thus extending the grazing season is one small way to lower production costs.

For more information on this or future workshops, please contact the St. John Valley SWCD at 834-3311, ext. 3.

JOB OPENING

A substitute Meals-on-Wheels dining center manager is needed at the Fort Kent Senior Center. The position is to relieve the present manager on sick days.

Pasture Walk

Optimizing Forage Quality and Production on Depleted Farmland to Extend the Grazing Season

In 2002, Mountain Ash Farm & Cattle Company of Frenchville received a *Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Grant* (SARE) to explore methods of improving forage quality and production on depleted farmland to extend the grazing season. By 2003, the farm had grazed 35 dry beef cows until November 23rd without feeding a single bale or compromising the body condition of the cows; in fact, body condition actually improved with late season grazing. This pasture walk will illustrate the techniques used to extend the grazing season. Please join our discussion on the economic importance of late season grazing.

Saturday, October 16th. 2004

1pm

Mountain Ash Farm & Cattle Co.

150 Church Avenue

Frenchville, ME

Learn about:

- Techniques for turning burned out crop fields into productive pasture;
- How inputs changed soil conditions over a 3-year period;
- How inputs also changed dry matter production (hay, silage, & pasture) over a 3-year period;
- The mystery of why nothing grows in some places...to seed or not to seed?
- The value and importance of extended grazing: how saving dollars in cow maintenance costs can add pennies per pound to the value of feeder calves.



Directions: We will meet at Dee and Dave Potter's house at 150 Church Ave in Frenchville. From Fort Kent, take North Perley Brook Rd (near Voisine's Exxon) about 4.5 miles to a T-intersection. Turn left and travel about another 1.5 miles. The road turns hard to the right and you'll see a fenced pasture. The house is a short distance further on the left. From Madawaska, take Rt. 1 to St. Luce Church in Frenchville. Turn left onto Church Ave and travel about 4.5 miles. Pass the Cyr Potato Corporation buildings, and the house will be a short distance further on the right.

Sponsored by the Mountain Ash Farm & Cattle Co. and the St. John Valley SWCD, with support from the Northeast Region SARE and the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service EQIP Education Program.