

Franklin County Soil and Water Conservation District Implements “Reading the Land” Grazing Grant and Grazing Planner Tricia LaValley Wins Merit Award

In an era where production costs are skyrocketing and pasture raised meat and milk are commanding higher sales prices, it makes economic sense to raise livestock on pastures. Although many farmers have looked toward various state and federal agencies for help with managing their pastures properly, they are still having difficulties applying concepts learned on their farms.

A decrease in funding for an already inadequate number of grazing specialists has resulted in requests for farm help going unmet. This is what spurred the Franklin County Soil and Water Conservation District, along with the assistance of Diane Dumont from Franklin County Cornell Cooperative Extension and John St. Mary from Brushton-Moira Central School, to embark on a project that would help the participants take a deeper look into pasture management, focusing on the land through biological monitoring of their grazing systems. The District applied for and won a Mini-Grant for Agricultural and Water Quality, from the Environmental Law Center based in Syracuse NY. The application “Reading the Land: Assessing Land Health and Productivity” focused on the land through biological monitoring of grazing systems.

Routine biological monitoring can show what is working on the farm and what is not, which in turn will tell us what needs to be re-evaluated and redesigned for a pasture management plan. Maybe there are too many animals in one pasture, maybe the animals are not being rotated through the pasture system fast enough, etc.

Tricia LaValley, District Technician from the Franklin County Soil and Water said, “This collaboration has given students and farmers alike the chance to work side by side to read the land and take pasture management to a whole new level.”

Franklin County Soil and Water has been conducting biological monitoring practices on 5 farms over the past 2 years and has seen positive ecological changes on the farms that are installing proper pasture management practices on their farms. “These practices are not only good for the environment, but they are also saving these producers money in grain, fuel costs for cutting hay, etc., therefore resulting in more sustainable operations and productions,” said LaValley.

This project focused on getting producers and students on their “hands and knees” to participate in group monitoring exercises that assessed the soil surface and the life upon and in it. They experienced real life scenarios, conducting on farm evaluations, and developing a “graziers eye.”

The long range goal of this project is to create successful graziers and develop a countywide mentoring network which will result in an end-product of profitable, sustainable livestock and dairy farms producing a consistent supply of pasture raised meat and milk for which there are significant niche markets.

Franklin County Soil and Water would like to thank everyone that participated in making this project a success. A special thanks goes to John St. Mary, Diane Dumont, Michael Downing, Roger Hastings, Kirby Selkirk, Bill and Sue Holbrook, Austin Dishaw, and Brad Wheeler. We would also like to thank Pat and Beth Downing for letting us utilize their farm on numerous occasions as a learning tool!

For more information on this project or pasture management in general, please contact Tricia from Franklin County Soil and Water at 518-483-4061.



Division V Merit Award:

Patricia LaValley, District Conservation Technician for Franklin County Soil and Water Conservation

District, won the CDEA Division V Merit Award. Tricia began with the district in February 2008 and single handedly took over the Agricultural Environmental Management program for soil and water. She has coordinated, conducted and implemented all of the AEM projects in Franklin County. In three years, Tricia worked with many local farmers on grazing practices and many other best management practices for agriculture.

She has been selected to conduct specialized grazing programs in the State and has just recently been awarded a mini-grant to work with local students on grazing.

Tricia has also participated in roundtables for grazing programs and many training programs.

With Tricia's skills and dedication, she has developed a cost share program supported

by Adirondack North Country Association for local farmers participating in grazing and environmental management.

On top of that significant undertaking, Tricia has also assisted with Conservation Field Days

with Cornell Cooperative Extension, the Envirothon, Boy Scout merit badges, Wetlands Reserve

Program monitoring, many watershed groups, Black River-St. Lawrence Resource Conservation

& Development Council, and so many more activities and functions. Tricia is a valuable

member of the Soil and Water Team of Franklin County.

