

Ian Mitchell-Innes Training comments and press generated by meetings

<http://countryfolks.com/were-not-overgrazing-were-under-managing/>

<http://blog.uvm.edu/pasture-vtpasture/2013/06/24/trampling-paradigms-in-vermont/>

<http://www.lancasterfarming.com/news/northeedition/Trampling-Paradigms-in-Vermont->

<http://onpasture.com/2013/07/22/its-ok-to-trample/>



- 1) I learned so much from this workshop! Before this I had just a vague understanding of mob grazing. Now I feel like I have a much better handle on the concepts and how to put them into practice. I really liked his specific examples, farm stories, and knowledge that is backed by years of practical experience. His explanation of how to amend pastures, fit them into cropping rotations, and animal considerations (don't change your environment to fit the animal, change the animal to fit the environment) will be of high value to both me personally and to the farmers that I work with. One huge take home point for me was that the plant stores energy differently at different levels, for example more energy is stored in the top third of the plant. This is really important information to farmers that are concerned about gains or milk production. They could potentially utilize this method of grazing, improve their soil, and maintain or increase production all at the same time. Even if farmers in my area aren't willing to try this method right now, being able to provide them with different ideas and concepts is always helpful.
- 2) I will use this information to assist the farmers that I work with that are currently grazing, as well as those that are new to grazing. This workshop gave me new "tools for my toolbox!" I have heard

before that it wasn't necessary to clip pastures, but didn't understand why not or how it could be done without clipping. Now I have a much better understanding of the techniques used and the potential benefits. At Cornell Cooperative Extension we work hard to provide all the information possible to producers, then encourage them to make decisions based on facts. This new information allows me to present different options to these farmers and encourages them to think outside the box. Even if they decide not to incorporate all of these methods, we can show them that "there is more than one way to skin a cat!"

This was definitely one of (if not the) best workshop/pasture walk I have been on. I really enjoyed the speakers personality, experience, the farm and farmers, and the other participants! Thanks so much for inviting me! The more I learn about grazing, the more I like it. I just read a Joel Salatin book, so I think there is no turning back. Ashley Pierce CCE

1. The perspective that I gained was to think more naturally. I loved having "mob grazing" defined better for me and to see an example of it. I appreciate thinking of improving soil by making minerals available to the cows and grazing for what you want, not focusing on what you don't. I'm still not sure how he plans his overstocking. I understand that over-grazing is a function of time, but would like more information on how to "plan overstocking" effectively. I did not agree with everything he talked about, but most of what he said made good sense.

2. My biggest regret is that I can't go home and try this out! It makes it hard for me to remember everything to pass on to my clients because the more you use it, the better you know it. However, I do have clients that would be very interested in this philosophy and I intend to pass on what I know and provide guidance as needed. Helen Terry

What did you learn or perspective gained?

You need to feed the soil! Trampling more than you feed has never really made sense to me (I mean what a waste, right?), but if your soil isn't happy, then your vegetation will surely show it. Fertilizing your soil until it is producing the best vegetation you can ask for makes complete sense! It was also interesting to learn that cutting hay does not produce the same amount of stress on the forage as grazing it does, therefore you do not get the "microbe explosion."

How will you use this knowledge or training to better yourself as a professional or use it with your agricultural clients?

It definitely gives a new perspective that will be very useful in our area! A lot of pastures are in need of fertilization and are not producing a good quality and quantity of vegetation. Increasing their stocking density or decreasing their paddock size and moving the cattle often is a good method to show producers how to naturally increase their soil production. Just takes a little time and patience! Also the comment, "Animals were made to walk to water, don't spend tons of money on expensive water points," will be a good fact to point out. A lot of farmers don't want to get into rotational grazing

because of the costs, but if they know that their cattle can walk a little for water, they may be more inclined to try it (less start-up costs). Tricia LaValley
Franklin County Soil & Water

Ian's wisdom helped reinforce some evolving beliefs based on my own experiences. I liked Ian's practicality, grounded in real-world experience. One of the key messages I took away from the day was to adapt knowledge to our own situations – what works on my farm may not work exactly the same way on someone else's, and not to get boxed into a "system". Brett Chedzoy CCE

Learned/perspective?

Very interesting to hear other methods. Very good to run through the drill again about why to move animals faster thru pasture.

Use Info?

Learned other ways of presenting the info to farmers... nice examples and thorough presentation of the chemical 'whys'. Sylvia Harris VT. NRCS

EXCELLENT DAY with Ian! I have rethought my thought process once again and have taken a very good liking to his approach. I learned more about high grass grazing and have already discussed it with two farmers that I did plans for as a TSP. Rich Redman PS; EXCELLENT PROGRAM!!!!

I better understand tall grass grazing, just haven't figured out how to do that during April and early May. I can use this knowledge to explain to my clients how to use this tool to graze their cattle and improve soil health if this fits the goals of that particular farm. John Wickham

1) I started thinking more about the residual forage left after a grazing bout, and looking at whether it was standing or trampled down.

Very important also – I now know where some of my clients got their wacky ideas! The beef farmers in the audience were notably silent about some of Ian's suggestions, saying nothing but most likely in agreement with that general consensus that they wouldn't be applicable to our region. Some of my clients do not have enough experience or knowledge to parse out the good ideas from the bad and they try some crazy stuff that makes a large mess.

2) I have already used some of these ideas to help clients think about how to manage their residual. This grazing year was notable for a slow start due to cool temperatures and drought, followed by excessive rain that really got the grass growing. Farms went from barely enough grass to a great excess in only a few days. If they can't get to it for hay, what should they do? I'm suggesting that they shouldn't make their animals eat the stems, that they would be better off to try to get the Coarse materials trampled into the ground.

Also, I have had people go back to their goals and objectives. Bruce Howlett

Newest information for me was about how the chemistry of plants (top third is energy/sugar, middle third is about fiber/carbon and bottom third is about protein/ammonia levels) affects the animals' weight, health, and, of course, their behavior.

This will help in explaining and demonstrating why management of grazing is so important, and provide tools for the decision-making of that management.
Kimberly Hagen

What did you learn or perspective gained? I learned about the role of protein in feed and how this can impact the physiology of animals. I also learned about the role of nitrogen fixing bacteria, and the similarity of rotational grazing to no-till agriculture. There was more that I learned, I took a lot of notes, but they aren't handy to refer to.

How will you use this knowledge or training to better yourself as a professional or use it with your agricultural clients? Yesterday I started a silvopasture project in my woods in Essex County, NY. I have designed an arrangement of paddocks that will be converted to grassed silvopasture from a current heavy stocking of mid-sized timber. I will sequence: chickens, forage grass seed mix onto scarified soil, hay dispersed and bunched, lambs eating hay and pushing seed into the mineral soil, lots of tree cutting to provide sunlight. I will also use the information in presentation when I talk with foresters and woodland owners about silvopasture. Peter Smallidge CCE

That day with Ian rocked my world, broke down all I knew, starting from ground zero, started moving stockers 4 times a day, the universe is the great equalizer, the fence broke now 1 big group, now 180 stockers moved twice a day, mob grazing 101. Brian Maloney Beef Farmer

What did you learn or perspective gained from the training?

At the Ian Mitchell Innes training I learned how different a group of people can look at a field and all think differently about it. There was a group of us professionals standing around looking at the same herd, same field but all had different ideas about how it should be grazed. I found that what I usually see as letting the grass grow too tall is not the mind set of others. They thought it should be taller. All this comes down to is that we could change ideas a millions times but if the farmer cannot get the cows moved any faster or leave them there longer it doesn't matter what we have planned for. Our plans are only as good as the way they fit into the operation that they are for. If a farmer can move cows only 2 times a day there is no sense in planning for 3 times a day just because it looks better in a grazing system etc.

How will I use the training to as a professional or us with ag clients?

Often the producers that I work with are so busy during the summer, harvesting hay, planting crops, grazing animals that they have not time to attend these meetings. If they leave the farm they have to pay someone to fill in for them. They then have to spend more money to attend the training. I use this as an opportunity to gather as much knowledge as I can and take it back to the producers when they have time to meet and see if any of it is applicable to their operations. This works well instead of several people going to the meeting I can go and then spread the word to several producers. I go to these trainings with all the farm plans I am working on in my head, and as the speaker is speaking I think how could what he is saying fit into those farms situations. If there is an idea from the training that I think

would work perfect for a certain producer, I contact them to discuss and make the changes in their farm plan. Ideas are always changing and so is life on the farm, animals # etc, so Conservation Plans are a working document that should change frequently to best fit the farm's needs. Tiffany Pinheiro SWCD

Good Morning-

Let me begin by saying "Thank You" for this opportunity. I had looked forward to the day to hopefully get a grasp on the whole mob grazing concept, and get some answers to the many questions rolling around in my head(yesplenty of room to roll!). When discussing grazing plans and strategies with a few producers in my county, mob grazing was a concept questioned briefly, and brushed over. Mostly because of a lack of knowledge on both parts...that just doesn't work for me. So I needed to get a handle on what it was, and why.

I arrived at the farm with the mindset that it was going to be hard to prove to me how putting more animal units per acre could benefit man or beast...again hard to grasp. How was this fella from South Africa going to convince me that this would work in Allegany County? What could this bring to benefit producers in my area?

Ian went to work. More questions, concepts, theories, possibilities rolled around in my head. Bouncing of each other and getting all scrambled together, it was a hodge podge of confusion and answers. Possibilities.....thats what I took from the day...one more tool, that in the right place at the right time could really make a difference. My eyes opened a bit more to management. More details, scrutiny and planning. More focus.

With what I took from the training , I feel I can better explain and discuss the possibilities of mob grazing, and how it could be implemented for the producer. Yes, I still have questions, but I'm that "Gotta see it " guy. It really energized my soil health focus, and added tools to the box! I would definitely do it again, and encourage producers to attend.

Thanks Again. Scott Alsworth, Allegany County Soil and Water Conservation District

What did you learn or perspective gained? 1. A better understanding of the term "mob grazing".

2. Mob grazing should be used as a tool in the NE US. It is not a silver bullet.

3. We say this over and over, "the manager or decision maker of the farm needs to evaluate his objective (s) regularly, even daily.

4. Most of Ian's tips are great, but some are contradictory of what we have learned from the agency experts and may not be entirely applicable here in the NE.

How will you use this knowledge or training to better yourself as a professional or use it with your agricultural clients?

1. I now see other tools and perspectives available for grazing mg't.

2. I now have more testimonial info to share. This is critical to me since I am not a practicing grazier.

3. Many of the topics discussed touched on new a new perspective of managing an old problem. Or a different decision making process or a twist on the farms' current business objectives. Scott Fitscher, NY NRCS

Ian Mitchell-Innes is certainly very compelling and the science behind his philosophy is plausible. Somehow it rings true with so much of what I've been hearing re. soil health and cultivating a dynamic soil ecosystem, from sources other than just graziers. I recently was talking to a very thoughtful farmer who raises crops primarily. He is moving away from 'conventional' methods. He made a statement that

has stuck with me and correlates with what IMI was promoting. We (farmers) are turning the soil into an almost sterile medium in which to dump seed and all the accompanying inputs. The soil becomes almost incidental. IMI left me thinking that in the context of livestock and grazing, the animals themselves are almost secondary to the process of cultivating a healthy and dynamic soil ecosystem ie the de-emphasis on genetics, breed etc. Not that I necessarily buy that completely, but I cannot deny it rings true.

The digestive component was helpful and it made me think a lot more seriously about the merits of harvesting the energy, as opposed to protein and fibres. After the initial grazing period of 'tall grazing' and the top 1/3rd principle, the logistics are less obvious as we graze the subsequent rotations. But the principles are glaringly obvious. I was interested in the whole Potassium factor. It left me feeling more ignorant than I thought, but perhaps more determined to improve the soil ecosystem on my farm.

As far as clients, it really goes without saying that if I am at all passionate about promoting grazing and soil health, I am compelled to underscore these principles with whoever I work/engage with. As IMI implied, the level of receptivity to doing what he does appears alarmingly limited and I/we can only expect a not dissimilar response. Jonathon Barter

1. Highly interested in what he was saying about the urine pH-what do you use to test it? Knowing how to manipulate the paddock shape to get different graze/trample ratios, and learning to watch what they do when you first let them into a new sward of grass to help with this.

2. Very excited to use some of what we are seeing and learning with my animals to be able to back the information up also gaining confidence in what I have been seeing with them already, so that I can say trust me I am trying it, have tried it and it makes a huge difference. Come and see my animals-let's see what can be done at your place. Major confidence builder for those that think outside books and research. Corrina Aldrich

Changed how I approach producers when it comes to grazing practices. There are so many practices and ideas out there now, farmers can do a trial and error to see what works for them

Learned a lot about good fencing! Learning basics of rotation, infrastructure, grass health, and animal dynamics! Hard to explain everything that has changed because of it.

I am a beginning farmer and am starting to record things on Troy Bishopp's grazing chart, I use the information to get started and improve my pastures.

You need to feed the soil! Trampling more than you feed has never really made sense to me (I mean what a waste, right?), but if your soil isn't happy, then your vegetation will surely show it. Fertilizing your soil until it is producing the best vegetation you can ask for makes complete sense!

I learned the chemistry behind the plant growth, and stage at which it is eaten and how that affects the health of the animal AND the plant.

The percentage that he wants farmers to trample down is a lot more after seeing it in the field than I have been having my farmers leave to trample.

Very interesting to hear other methods. Very good to run through the drill again about why to move animals faster thru pasture.

Better understanding of how to manage grazing to get trampling, and when during the season it might be effective

It definitely gives a new perspective that will be very useful in our area! A lot of pastures are in need of fertilization and are not producing a good quality and/or quantity of vegetation. This will be a good method to show them how to naturally increase their soil production. Just takes a little time and patience!

This information will be a boost to the justification for rotating animals on pastures and when that should be done, and provide good guidance for the farmer on how to make that decision.

I attend these workshops to be able to take the information back to my farmers who may not be able to attend because they cannot leave the farm.

Learned other ways of presenting the info to farmers... nice examples and thorough presentation of the chemical 'whys'

I have already used it to help a client determine how best to manage their excessive spring growth

The best pasture meeting I have ever attended, anything holistic and grazing.

Ian was a HOOT! Loved his approach and attitude both to grazing and life.

Ian was AMAZING! I think that was the best presentation and pasture walk I have ever been on!!! Love it!! I would love to learn more about sheep on pasture and any differences they present when mob grazing.