FINAL Participant Questionnaire and Reflection summaries on NESARE PDP Project Utilizing Holistic Planned Grazing as a Regenerative Engine for Sustainable Agriculture

**1: Have you changed your approach, behavior and/or line of questioning when assisting farmers? If so, what have you changed?**

*I have more understanding of all the facets that come into play. I plan for progress in baby steps so as not to overwhelm and ensure progress and success.*

*I ask “why?” a lot. I ask people about their skills and likes, about the future they are looking for, and about who makes the final decisions/who has to be pleased with the results.*

*I have come to the realization that when I network with farmers, or when they come to me with questions, I have a greater RESPONSIBILITY to be more thoughtful in what I share, and I also have greater opportunities.*

*I have changed my approach. I now START my visit/consultation with an inquiry about whether they are happy about their current farming operation. Then I ask what do they like to do most on the operation and what their least favorite task is. Almost always, the other information I need to ask/know comes on its own accord.*

*The holistic grazing format is excellent and I have enjoyed all that I have learned. I didn't find any one aspect better than another, I try to think holistically about every farm I plan.*

*Yes, I try to get at what the longer term goals are for the operation and to help to define some quality of life considerations. I try to get people to ask the tough questions of themselves and their operational goals-both short term and long term-Is this going to get me where I need to be or is it just something I am doing because my neighbor is doing it or the feed guys said it will “cure all my problems”.*

*I have changed my approach and line of questioning when assisting farmers. I try to find out why they want to graze and how they see this fitting into their current management system.*

*This has definitely changed my approach in working with farmers. I now think more of the farm as a whole and the lifestyle of the farmer when they ask questions. I don’t just have a black and white answer or suggestion, but instead try to think broadly and give them different options.*

**2: Have you altered your decision making process in terms of how you assist farmers? and “Have any of the farmers you worked with changed the way they make on-farm decisions?”**

*Progress is never as rapid as one would like but I would say some of the landowners have demonstrated a more instinctive interest in grass as a crop and as an expression of what’s underneath it.*

*I have changed my decision making process as well. I now think more about the long term impacts of any changes they want to make, how that can effect a different part of the farm, and how this may affect them personally. I have had farmers adopt the grazing chart with success. Even those that are not using the chart are still benefitting from the change in thinking and are planning ahead.*

*I do believe that I have altered my decision making process of how I assist farmers--I work to develop a plan that will fit with their goals, management, as well as challenge them to think differently and try something new. I do have some farmers that have changed how they make on-farm decisions and it has surprised them!*

*Yes, I have. I think some have put more thought into other considerations rather than just the monetary aspects.*

*I try to get farmers to do a business plan before making radical changes.*

**3: Have any of the farms you worked with made changes in their practices? If so, what/how did they change?**

*Monitoring of results from the adoption of the planned grazing process is also an important facet that is missed in many cases. To provide examples of and demonstrate the use of the grazing charts, at the least, gave many farmers the exposure to a new way of allocating forage and utilizing the resources they have available without added expenses. Example: One farmer, with a confined herd that had been relying on TMR, had an eye opening experience with a rapid increase in the cost of purchased feed. He moved his herd outside onto pasture and saved $6000 in two months using home grown forage to replace the TMR.*

*One farm decided to get out of grazing… they saw that they were not really willing to do all that was necessary for successful grazing and wanted a different lifestyle.*

*The farmers were willing to try leaving a taller grazing residual and reduce some post-grazing clips. As a result, their forage is bouncing back faster from the root growth and was better able to handle the extreme rains early in the summer.*

*They are implementing a more thoughtful/careful use of land, and impacts on soil and water. So - grazing with quicker moves and leaving more residue, making sure that any waterways or wet areas are seen as delicate, and needing careful treading by animals, and deeper respect for the biological cycles and letting nature do its job with bacteria, insects, amphibians, birds and other wildlife out in the pasture.*

*Yes, some have used the grazing chart as a way to plan for season extension or are using them to track what they do as they do it so they can use it for a reference for the future and to help keep a record of the season.*

*Smaller paddocks and more frequent moves for the livestock. A few of the farms I have worked with take a more hands-on approach to grazing management now. They spend more time on the pasture really looking at the forage and soil health. There has also been an increase in requests for grazing charts and assistance.*

*Several farmers improved their grazing record-keeping. Some farmers started to recognize the deficiencies in their current grazing system (generally the forage production) and have taken steps to remedy the short-comings. Several farmers expanded or intensified their grazing system after recognizing the success of their initial efforts.*

*Three farmers that I have been working with now graze taller, have a longer rest period, and leave more residual. All are extremely happen with the results.*

**4: Of the 4 holistic grazing planning components taught (farm/family goal & values, grazing chart planning, financial (impacts?) and biological monitoring), which ones do you use with your farmers?**

*Grazing chart planning and biological monitoring are the two primary ones as they are very hands on and can get the farmers moving into the thought process to set goals for improvement based upon where they start from with these tools. They seem to be the basis for getting the conversation going on the other two items of farm family goals and values, and financial impact****.***

*I use all to varying degrees…. farm/family goal & values (most), grazing chart planning (hard to get them to use), financial (this is why I encourage business plan) and less with the biological monitoring with farmers.*

*Biological monitoring was the only grazing component I didn't employ out on the farm. Grazing charts were useful to explain the rotational concept, and give farmers a visual of their pastures and days grazed. Financials were always important when justifying rotational grazing. Goals and values, although hard to extract, were very helpful to successful planning.*

*Of the 4 I use biological monitoring and financial impacts first, farm/family goals second and the grazing charts last. I have used them all with the people that I have worked with.*

**5. What have farmers been asking for in terms of technical assistance with grazing?**

*Reseeding of former crop fields, identifying plants in pastures, weed management, planning with them on pasture management plans (rotational grazing type plans), extending the grazing season, asking for more assistance/information on their woodland portions of their operations, watering systems.*

*I have two groups of farmers: those that have been doing it for a few years and the beginners. The "advanced" group wants help with grazing chart planning and on-going support and feedback on how they are doing. The beginners want help with fencing options, stocking rate, and general planning.*

*It’s pretty rare for farmers to ask for anything besides money. Their compliance with requirements (the strings attached) is the model they are used to. My experience is to meet them where their “stuck” and provide a window for them to “self-discover” the answers to their questions.*

*The most frequent request is how to improve the pasture quality and quantity, and then, how to get their animals to graze better.*

*How to better manage the forage resource for season extension and to be able to feed/buy less hay. How to cope with some of the weird weather patterns-long wet conditions-dry periods etc.*

**6: Do you think the Project was worth your time and participation? If so, why? If not, what were you looking for that you didn’t get? Also, list any unexpected results you got from the Project?**

*The practical training in high-density grazing has affected not only my technical assistance provision ability as a new tool in the tool box, but has been incorporated into our grazing research ideas for the future (including a grant proposal submitted to SARE this year). The biological landscape monitoring tool is an active part of a Vermont CIG grant demonstrating the regenerative qualities of grass-based agriculture.*

*AN EXCELLENT PROJECT! A great opportunity to meet fellow educators and seasoned grazers. A great self confidence builder for me. I feel I can go out to a farm, be a good listener, and suggest possible grazing scenarios with a relative degree of confidence for success. I have discovered that these farmers not only become clients, to justify my existence, they usually become good friends. Every grazer becomes another learning tool for me as well.*

*Any time we can get farmers and resource specialist together in whatever mix, disproportioned, top heavy, confused, excited, etc. the “herd effect” will present value to the participants. Maybe not during the encounter but at some point the learning will have value. My participation was definitely worthwhile based on my Holistic Goal and the opportunity to influence trainees, farmers and leadership.*

*Yes definitely…. helped me to understand the challenges and rewards of grazing and how to relate that with farmers.*

*It was totally worth my time. I enjoyed it and got a lot out of it. I just can’t get a read on our clients, as to why they are not interested.*

*Yes, the project was most definitely worth my time and participation. It was extremely valuable to have the shared time on learning tasks with other service providers working in the Agricultural community and sharing their perspectives on the materials. My greatest unexpected result was finding out how important that issue of farm/family goals and values was for the big picture and getting things figured out for the farm. I knew it was important, but going through this process REALLY reinforced what I thought I already knew.*

*I think it has been one of the best trainings to prove a little advance planning and writing it down can go a long way to help meet financial and personal goals-especially when it comes to looking at a farm as a whole unit not just the different units such as grass, livestock, people. I think it also helps people to think outside the box as to what other potential resources they may have sitting right under their noses as well as management strategies to make the most efficient use of what is already there.*

*I think this project was worth the time and participation. I have gained a lot of on-farm experience that I probably wouldn’t have received if not for this program. It also gave me a chance to spend a little more time on the farms that I was focused on so I was able to see the changes over the 3 years instead of just hearing about it, or worse, not even knowing that changes were happening.*

*The Project was definitely worth my time and I'm sad it's over. I do feel that I received more than I was expecting. I expected more "class time" and was pleasantly surprised to see this take a different path by using local (and not so local) conferences, pastures walks, etc. Another unexpected result was being "coerced" into orchestrating 2 pasture walks, and writing articles on them.*

*This project was 100% worth my time and participation. I not only am better able to assist farmers reach their goals, but also have used the tenants of Holistic Management to become a better CCE Educator. I take more time for planning, goal setting, and monitoring in my career duties and can apply this to our farmer outreach, all of which is helping to make me more effective.*

*I found that the training offered me another tool that is for meeting the grazers needs as it is meeting them on their own personal level and not just on the business/farm operation level. I can better show people in depth components about their land, grass, grazing, cows, and maybe their operation when they are ready to receive it. I find that I am trying to help them stimulate their own thinking about what they can do.*

*The project was worth my time. It took me out of my comfort zone and expanded my horizons. There was some good professional development, but I expected more of my peers to be enthusiastic about it. I would have like to see more training on holistic financial management.*

*Yes, because nothing worthwhile happens in a hurry and the gradual infiltration of principles into the brain is a process and so if it takes time to sink in to those trying to promote it, it takes that much more time for the principles to be disseminated into the cultural mindsets of the majority. Thankfully there are always a few who have figured it all out by themselves and are themselves trendsetters by example.*

*Unexpected Results- There was disappointment in that there were landowners who got so far and then ‘pulled out’. Also the day with Communications guru, Fred Ashforth was fun but I’m never entirely comfortable seeing myself as a ‘salesperson’. If something is true/real it grabs you and changes you and then you can change others, not because you can get something out of it but so that they experience something themselves.*

**7: In terms of your participation what was the biggest challenge for you to get to the training venues/tools?**

*Workload and previous commitments made getting to all of the venues difficult.*

*The greatest challenge was the time - during the grazing season when demands on my time at work were very strong, and trying to carve out the time for this. Yet, once I was at the trainings - it was so obvious how important and complementary it was to my work!*

*My work schedule; myself.*

*Luckily, my office was supportive of my involvement in this program and I have not encountered any obstacles.*

*Living along the Canadian border in the northern most part of Franklin County makes travelling to any training a challenge. The trainings were worth the travel time though and getting reimbursed for everything helped with getting Board approval for the travel.*

*No challenges on anything local. The Vermont trainings sounded great, but to schedule them in the dead of winter was not convenient at all.*

*I was fortunate to have Conservation District support for this project. Travel and meetings for this project were not an issue for me or the District.*