



grassLAND 2.0

POLICY BRIEF

Status and Trends in Support for Managed Grazing and Grasslands in Wisconsin

DRAFT

AUTHORS

Adena Rissman, Vilas Distinguished Achievement Professor, University of Wisconsin–Madison

Erin Green, Research Assistant, University of Wisconsin–Madison



Status and Trends in Support for Managed Grazing and Grasslands in Wisconsin

DRAFT

This policy brief provides an overview of the policy tools and implementation capacity that supports managed grazing and grasslands in Wisconsin. It is designed to provide an overview for decision-makers and stakeholders and links to policy documents. We have reviewed incentives, technical assistance, certification, and other policies, but do not include research support.

Trends in Pasture and Grasslands

Pasture and grassland have declined substantially. Wisconsin had 1.1 million acres of non-woodland pasture in 2017, a decline of 39% from 1.9 million acres in 1997¹. Grassland not including pasture was 310,000 acres in 2016, down 12% since 2001 from 350,000 acres². Pasture is located on 45% of Wisconsin farms but only makes up 7% of Wisconsin farmland. In addition, about 15% of Wisconsin farms have woodlands that are grazed³.

Organizations Supporting Grazing

GrassWorks⁴, Wisconsin's statewide member-based grazing organization, provides leadership and education to farmers and consumers for the advancement of managed grazing. GrassWorks offers a Grazing Guidebook⁵, pasture walks, presentations, newsletters, and field days among other educational opportunities. They host a statewide grazing conference⁶ annually and support regional grazing networks⁷. A number of organizations provide pasture walks, education, and information on grazing in their programming and publications. For instance, Wisconsin Farmers Union typically partners with several Resource Conservation & Development Councils (RC&Ds) to host pasture walks for peer-to-peer learning on grazing practices and information for the general public. Pasture walks, education, and information are also provided by some County Land Conservation Departments, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service (MOSES),

the University of Wisconsin (UW) Division of Extension, and Trout Unlimited. In addition, the UW-Madison Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems (CIAS) holds field days, produces information resources, and teaches a yearly Wisconsin School for Beginning Dairy and Livestock⁸, typically taught in-person and remotely broadcasted in Wisconsin for 20-30 students per year on how to start and succeed in grass-based dairy and livestock.

Federal Funds

Commodity subsidies and crop insurance provides substantial support for row crops such as corn and soybeans. Crop insurance buffers against revenue changes as well as risks like flooding and drought. In contrast, the support provided for pasture is not nearly as well developed. For instance, Whole-Farm Revenue Protection was created in the 2014 Farm Bill and can help graziers, but its lack of familiarity and paperwork requirements have hindered adoption. Insurance payments in Wisconsin averaged \$104 million per year for corn, \$35 million for soybeans and for \$6 million for forage and pasture from 2010 to 2019⁹. Commodity subsidies averaged \$91 million per year for corn, \$445 million for soybeans, and \$0 for pasture and forage from 2010 to 2018¹⁰.

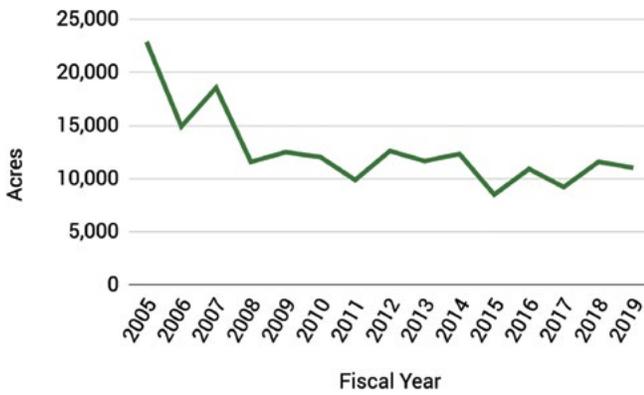


Figure 1. Natural Resources Conservation Service incentives for prescribed grazing - this figure shows the acreage in Wisconsin that received NRCS incentives for prescribed grazing¹¹.

The federal government provides cost-sharing to farmers through Farm Bill programs. Wisconsin farmers received \$24.3 million from the NRCS for pasture obligations from 2010 to 2019 through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). This is a small fraction (6%) of total EQIP and CSP expenditures in Wisconsin. In addition, federal funds that support grazing networks and education have declined due to the end of funding for the Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI), 2004-2012. The GLCI provided technical assistance and education related to grazing. The GLCI was formed in 1991 and started being administered in Wisconsin by 1999. In 2004 the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP) took over administration of state GLCI funds¹². By 2013, the state provided \$375,500 annually to GLCI and was consistently receiving more grant requests than they had available funding. Under GLCI, planners created and revised over 2,200 grazing plans for farmers in Wisconsin between 2004 and 2012. The Wisconsin match program was repealed in 2013 under Wisconsin Act 20¹³. Currently, NRCS administers monies that support grazing through the combination of EQIP and RCPP-EQIP practices. In fiscal year 2020 the preliminary totals for grassland

practices was \$34 Million, with a total of 1,502 contracts encompassing 157,571 acres. In addition, there were \$10.2 Million for local workgroups (\$5.8M cropland, \$3.2M forest, \$1.2M pasture); \$4.6 Million for farmstead and \$3.4 Million for soil health contracts.

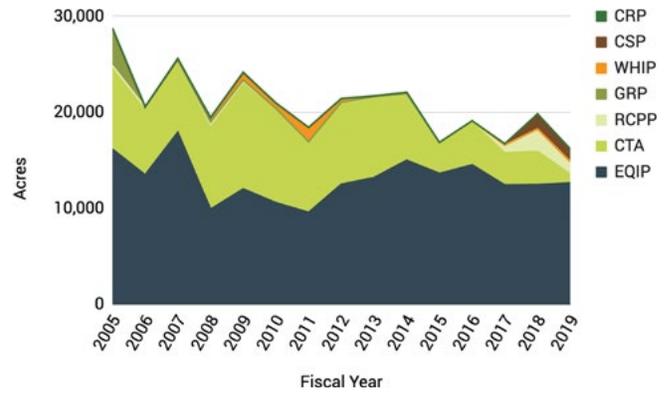


Figure 2. Wisconsin Land Unit Acres Receiving Grazing Land Conservation Practices by Program - This figure depicts the acreage receiving assistance for grazing land conservation practices by NRCS program in Wisconsin. The programs are the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA), Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Grassland Reserve Program (GRP), Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), and Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP)¹⁴.

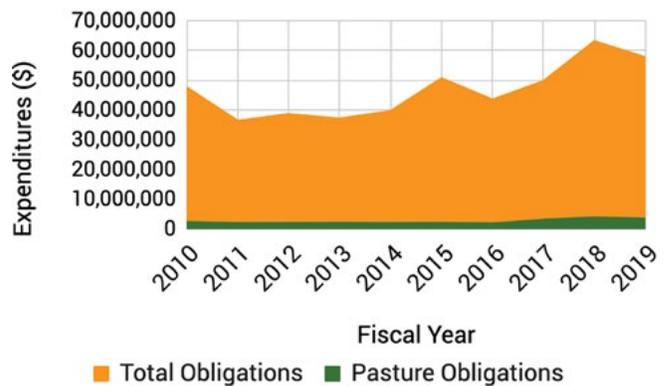


Figure 3. NRCS total and pasture-related funding obligations by fiscal year through EQIP and CSP contracts.

State and Local Funds and Plans

From 1999-2014, Wisconsin received yearly federal and sometimes state funding for the Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative which provided technical assistance, education, and research related to grazing. While Wisconsin no longer has any statewide grants or incentives specifically for grazing and pasture, some grant programs for water quality and wildlife provide funds for creation of grazing and pasture lands or grasslands.

Some local governments also provide grazing support. Counties have the ability to cost-share managed grazing practices and provide technical assistance if it is identified as a local priority. For instance, Washburn County offers cost-share¹⁵ for fencing, livestock access lanes, stream crossings, watering facilities, and pasture establishment to promote rotational grazing. Other counties - such as Columbia, Dane, Lincoln, and Marathon Counties - have programs that provide planning and technical assistance as well as funding for farmers wanting to transition to grazing or pasture.

Wisconsin does not currently have a statewide grazing plan. In 2002, Wisconsin released a statewide plan for agriculture¹⁶ that included mentions of grazing, but no plan to incentivize or increase grazing in the state. The Wisconsin DNR is in the process of developing a statewide grazing program for state lands. Some county land and water resource management plans have mentioned the benefits of grazing and grasslands and have set goals to promote grazing.

Staff Supporting Grazing

State and federal staffing support for grazing has declined in NRCS, DATCP, and UW-Madison Division of Extension but increased at WDNR.

County land and water conservation staff also help support graziers. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Wisconsin has 96 Certified Prescribed Grazing Planners²³ who spend a portion of their time on grazing and are employed through NRCS, counties, nonprofit organizations, and private consulting groups.

Grass-based Labels and Certifications

Grass-based dairy and meat is often labeled or certified to inform consumers. A few of these labels are connected to formal governance systems through certification. For instance, milk and meat that are certified organic by the U.S. Department of Agriculture must have cows on pasture 120 days per year for 30% of their diet. Wisconsin had 453 organic dairy farms selling milk from cows with sales of \$126 million as of 2016²⁴. 586 farms sold \$16 million in products from beef and other cattle. Wisconsin had 51,870 acres of certified organic pastureland/ rangeland²⁵. Some programs require 100% grass-fed, such as Organic Plus Trust and American Grassfed Association.

STAFF DEDICATED TO GRAZING IN 2020, NOT INCLUDING RESEARCH		NOTES
0.30 ¹⁷	University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension	The Extension grazing research specialist retired in 2014 ¹⁸ .
2.5 ¹⁹	UW-Madison, Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems	Number of staff that are working on Wisconsin School for Beginning Dairy and Livestock School and outreach publications.
0.25 ²⁰	Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP)	DATCP had a full-time person supporting 50% grazing and 50% organic livestock, from 2006 through 2014.
2.5 ²¹	Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources	Number of staff dedicated to grazing has been on the rise at the DNR over the past 2.5 years as development of a statewide DNR public lands grazing program progresses ²² .

Public Lands Grazing

The DNR allows conservation grazing in some wildlife management areas across the state. They also have a collaborative project with University Extension and private graziers called Grazing Public Lands in Wisconsin²⁶. The fact sheet for the program can be found here²⁷. This project evaluates the opportunities and challenges of rotationally-grazed livestock for conservation on public grasslands. There is a small bison herd at the Sandhill Wildlife Area.

Tribal Grazing

Several tribes pasture livestock. For instance, the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin has a State Farm Grazing Project²⁸ meant to improve water quality and soil health in the Trout Creek watershed. They also maintain the Oneida Nation Farms and Agriculture Center that raises steers, cow-calf pairs, and grass-fed bison²⁹. The Forest County Potawatomi own and operate a farm called Bodwéwadmí Ktëgan, where they raise pastured chickens, hogs, grass-fed cattle and bison.

Property Taxes

Agricultural land including grazing land has lower tax rates in Wisconsin, but grassland without grazing or haying is subject to higher taxes.

Land Access Assistance for New Farmers

Wisconsin does not have a dedicated statewide program to provide land access assistance to new farmers. However, many land trusts, farm organizations, universities, and local state and federal staff assist people in accessing land to become farmers.

ENDNOTES

- 1 United States Department of Agriculture. Agricultural Census. Note: This figure includes agricultural land, pastureland (excluding woodland), 1997-2017.
- 2 National Land Cover Database. 2001-2016. https://www.usgs.gov/centers/eros/science/national-land-cover-database?qt-science_center_objects=0#qt-science_center_objects
- 3 United States Department of Agriculture. 2017. Census of Agriculture https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Full_Report/Volume_1,_Chapter_1_State_Level/Wisconsin/st55_1_0007_0008.pdf.
- 4 See <https://grassworks.org/>
- 5 See <https://grassworks.org/resources/guidebook/>
- 6 See <https://grassworks.org/events/grazing-conference/>
- 7 See <https://grassworks.org/resources/grazing-networks/>
- 8 See <http://wsbdf.wisc.edu/>
- 9 United States Department of Agriculture. Risk Management Agency. 2010-2019. Note: Insurance payments for forage and pasture include Forage Production, Forage Seeding, and Pasture, Rangeland, Forage programs. <https://www.rma.usda.gov/SummaryOfBusiness>
- 10 Environmental Working Group (EWG). 2010-2018. Note: Commodity payments in EWG include Direct Payments and Production Flexibility Contracts, Average Crop Revenue Election, Agricultural Risk Coverage, and Price Loss Coverage programs. <https://farm.ewg.org/region.php?fips=55000&statername=Wisconsin>
- 11 United States Department of Agriculture. Natural Resources Conservation Service. NRCS Conservation Programs. https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Internet/NRCS_RCA/reports/cp_wi.html
- 12 Wisconsin GLCI Steering Committee. 2011. Wisconsin grazing lands conservation initiative strategic plan 2011-2016. https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/nrcs142p2_019548.pdf
- 13 Legislative Fiscal Bureau. Joint Committee on Finance. 2019. Dairy assistance programs (agriculture, trade, and consumer protection).
- 14 United States Department of Agriculture. Natural Resources Conservation Service. NRCS Conservation Programs. https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Internet/NRCS_RCA/reports/cp_wi.html
- 15 See <https://www.co.washburn.wi.us/images/custom/departments/land-water/pastures.pdf>
- 16 See https://doa.wi.gov/DIR/Comp_Planning_Ag-Guide.pdf
- 17 Heidi Johnson. Agriculture Institute Director. University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension. July 2020. Email correspondence.
- 18 University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension. N.D. Scholar Profiles: Admin leave/retired. <https://fyi.extension.wisc.edu/agscholarship/retired/>
- 19 Regina Hirsch. University of Wisconsin-Madison Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems. October 2020. Email correspondence.
- 20 Kara Kasten-Olson. Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection. July 2020. Email correspondence.
- 21 Mary C. Anderson. Conservation Agriculture Specialist. Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. August 2020. Email correspondence.
- 22 Kara Kasten-Olson. Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection. July 2020. Email correspondence.
- 23 See https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/wi/technical/cp/tsp/?cid=nrcs142p2_020810
- 24 United States Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service. 2017. 2016 Certified Organic Survey – Wisconsin.
- 25 United States Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service. 2017. 2016 Certified Organic Survey – Wisconsin.
- 26 See <https://grazingpubliclands.wisc.edu/>
- 27 See <https://pastureproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Grazing-Public-Lands.pdf>
- 28 See <https://oneida-nsn.gov/dl-file.php?file=2018/02/State-Farm-Grazing-MELIS-edit.pdf>
- 29 Oneida Nation. 2018. Farmlands that Provide. <https://oneida-nsn.gov/dl-file.php?file=2018/01/Chapter-5-Farmlands-that-Provide.pdf>

grasslandag.org



Grassland 2.0 is a collaborative group of farmers, researchers, and public and private sector leaders working to develop pathways for increased farmer profitability, yield stability and nutrient and water efficiency, while improving water quality, soil health, biodiversity, and climate resilience through grassland-based agriculture.

The project is based at UW–Madison and the work is supported by the Sustainable Agriculture Systems Coordinated Agricultural Program grant no. 2019-68012-29852 from the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture.