



GrassWorks, Inc.

Strategic Plan

2019 to 2025

GrassWorks, Inc. Strategic Plan 2019 to 2025

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Introduction

GrassWorks, Inc. is a grassroots membership organization that provides leadership and education to farmers and consumers for the advancement of managed grass-based agriculture to benefit present and future generations. GrassWorks serves its growing membership by fostering farmer-to-farmer learning, networking and community; providing programs that meet the needs of our members and other stakeholders; and supporting local grazing networks. We serve as a clearinghouse of grazing information for Wisconsin, the region and beyond. This strategic plan guides our efforts to expand managed grazing with GrassWorks, Inc. serving as the recognized resource hub for graziers and others interested in managed grazing - regionally, nationally and internationally.

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Brian Pillsbury
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

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Jill Hapner, Ph.D., Executive Director
Heather Flashinski, Conference Planner

Background, History, Current Situation

Managed Grazing is an economically and environmentally sound method of livestock agriculture. For nearly 30 years, managed grazing has been a foundation of the sustainable agriculture movement in the Upper Midwest and we are proud of the role that GrassWorks has played in its development.

GrassWorks is a grassroots membership association. As a 501(c)3 non-profit organization, GrassWorks links farmers with the resources they need to be successful graziers. Funding for this work has been acquired through a combination of grants, annual membership dues, donations, seed and livestock sales, and educational publication sales.

GrassWorks provides leadership, education and resources for grass-based farmers and regional organizations that support graziers. We represent them and work to make farm policy fair for all managed grazing farmers. We increase awareness of the benefits of managed grazing among farmers, policy makers and the general public. We advocate for research and public policies that recognize managed grazing as a tool for improving the quality of our food, the quality of our environment, the stewardship of animals, the profitability of our farms and the respect for farming as an honorable and meaningful vocation.

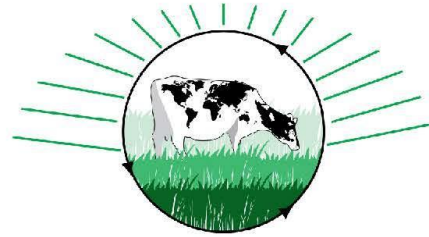
GrassWorks communicates via a website, fact sheets, presentations, the Grazing Guidebook, a newsletter, the annual Grazing Conference, other agricultural conference and trade shows, field days and pasture walks. We link regional grazing networks in collaborative efforts to share resources and activities.

GrassWorks partners with public agencies in delivering services and programs. We have alliances with other groups including, farm groups, non-profits organizations, consumer groups, environmental groups, educational groups and businesses.

GrassWorks facilitates on-farm research by members and collaborates with science professionals to support relevant evaluation of grazing practices. We help to gather and disseminate data regarding the impacts of managed grazing on our communities, our environment and our society. We share this information to support and encourage needed policy changes.

GrassWorks encourages young people to begin farming by partnering with the Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship Program. We encourage experienced graziers to share their wisdom with the next generation. We recognize and support the pioneers and grazing advocates who plant the seeds of a better tomorrow. Our goal is to continue to advance managed grazing as an important component of agricultural production in Wisconsin and the USA.

GrassWorks, Inc.
Board of Directors
Geographic Representation



GrassWorks Inc.



Strategic Planning Process Overview

This strategic planning process began in earnest with a visioning session held during the 2018 GrassWorks Grazing Conference. Approximately 130 conference attendees indicated their top reasons for attending the conference and interests in being a GrassWorks member by responding to a dot survey onsite. Following the organization’s annual meeting during the conference, dozens of conference attendees participated in a facilitated visioning session where they identified a set of key vision ideas for the grazing community as a whole as well as some of the notable strengths, opportunities and challenges that they recognize as a community of graziers. With these key vision ideas in mind, the Board of Directors, advisors and staff of GrassWorks, Inc. proceeded to develop this strategic plan over the course of four meetings held in March, April, May and September of 2018. They worked to clarify vision ideas, identify current goals for GrassWorks, and determine a set of actions to address each goal. This strategic planning effort was facilitated by University of Wisconsin-Extension Community Development Educator Nathan Sandwick.

Conference participants were invited to share ideas for the future of grazing.

Why did you attend the conference?


Use only 2 of the 4 dot stickers provided in your registration packet. Place the stickers next to each of your top two response options for this question.

16 + 46 + 23 + 17 = 102	To meet with other graziers
19 + 48 + 21 + 22 = 110	To see a good speaker

What does (or would) interest you most about being a Grassworks member?

Use only 2 of the 4 dot stickers provided in your registration packet. Place the stickers next to each of your top two response options for this question.


0 + 7 + 2 + 2 = 11	Getting a discount at the annual conference
2 + 0 + 0 + 0 = 2	Being part of a statewide organization
18 + 19 + 35 + 10 = 82	Opportunities to get more information and education
	Opportunities for me to support other graziers
	Making a tax deductible contribution
	Supporting Grassworks in encouraging and educating the community of graziers
	Supporting Grassworks in promoting welfare of livestock
	Supporting Grassworks in promoting healthy food
	Supporting Grassworks in reaching out to consumers
	Supporting Grassworks in serving as a voice for graziers



Future of GrassWorks
Striving for greener pastures? GrassWorks is aiming to help.

The leaders of GrassWorks would like to hear your ideas for the future of grazing.

Please stick around for an interactive discussion to share lots of useful input in a short time!



GrassWorks' Mission and Vision

Mission Statement

GrassWorks is a membership organization that provides leadership and education to farmers and consumers for the advancement of managed grass-based agriculture to benefit present and future generations.

Vision Statement

We envision a future in which profitable and viable pasture-based agriculture flourishes, where healthy livestock are raised on well-managed pastures in harmony with the environment, and where managed grazing takes its place as a mainstream sustainable livestock production practice. As a result of our work, managed grazing will grow and Wisconsin graziers will meet the needs of a growing number of health conscious consumers who desire healthy pasture-raised meats and dairy products.

The following **vision ideas** further describe what GrassWorks would like to see in the years to come:

Economically viable grazing operations:

- Graziers are known for managing pastures as an economically viable, income generating enterprise.
- Grazing farms are viable, profitable and competitive and their operators are professional.
- Graziers create value beyond economics (beyond the dollar value of sales). Data indicating environmental benefits, health and nutritional qualities and business advantages of managed grazing is readily available and kept up-to-date.
- Graziers are self-regulating - their brand is not dictated by others.
- Grazing operations have support from groups and agencies that serve farms.

Positive social impacts on rural communities:

- Family farmers benefit society and the local economy. They play an important role in rebuilding rural communities and giving back to communities.
- Communities experience favorable outcomes which they associate with a return to grazing, a sustainable form of agriculture.
- Grazing is recognized as a potential remedy for the decline in viable family farms in rural communities.
- The agricultural service sector expands as they sell suitable products and services to graziers.

Environment and health benefits for consumers who support the growth of grazing:

- An increase in perennial, grazing-based agriculture reduces soil erosion and use of synthetic inputs, protects water quality and provides high quality wildlife and pollinator habitat.
- Discerning consumers drive-up demand for quality grass fed products. Environmental & health benefits appeal to consumers.
- A broad base of farmers and consumers push for grazing to grow.

Outcomes needed to realize our goals:

- Collaboration among stakeholders, and support from groups and agencies that had previously neglected grazing.
- Support for current graziers as well as potential farmers to switch to grazing.
- Graziers' neighbors seeing that grazing is more economical than conventional farming, and becoming convinced to switch to grazing.
- Business considerations no longer overshadowing realizations that grazing is beneficial to the environment.
- Grazing being driven forward by more new farmers getting into grazing and by growing demand from consumers.

Overview of Strategic Goals (2019-2025)

- 1.) Raise awareness about grazing: What is managed grazing?
- 2.) Share knowledge with graziers and potential graziers. Connect graziers.
- 3.) Motivate people to be graziers.
- 4.) Encourage a market-driven style of conservation agriculture.
- 5.) Be a unified voice with farm groups and policy makers promoting the benefits of grass-based farming.

Strategic Goals and Actions

1.) Raise awareness about grazing - “What is managed grazing?”

Part of raising awareness about grazing is defining the distinction between grazing and managed grazing and addressing the misconception of “good grazing”. Managed grazing is adaptable. Managed grazing can and will look different based on each farmer and his or her land and goals. A managed grazing mindset requires thinking of oneself as a grass farmer instead of a livestock farmer by focusing on grass as a crop and using animals to manage it. Farmers continue to grow food and use an environmentally-sustainable way to do that. By continuing to raise awareness about grazing, crop farmers see the value of integrating managed grazing and consumers will see that the quality of the food you eat is important.

Measures (How we will know we have achieved this goal):

- Increase in the number of acres planted in pasture (Wisconsin and the Midwest).
- Farmers put livestock in a managed grazing system.
- Consumers drive-up the demand for grass-fed products.
- Farmers, consumers, marketers, elected officials and government agency personnel will be convinced that this is a more viable and sustainable livestock production system.

Strategic Actions
Deliver basic Grazing Ambassadors Program presentation.
Update and maintain GrassWorks website with useful and timely information.
Promote and expand Grazing Ambassadors Program.
Organize consumer-based pasture walks.
Partner to organize and provide workshops on topics that are pertinent to current grazing issues.
Identify opportunities to educate the public, businesses, agencies, potential graziers, etc. through wider venues such as television, radio, social media and billboards.
Expand into Vocational Agriculture Programs, Future Farmers of America curricula, and other science classes in schools.

2.) Share knowledge with graziers and potential graziers. Connect graziers.

Sharing information with graziers and potential graziers that demonstrates economically viable farming systems for small farms and provides an initiative for conventional farmers to make the leap to grazing. Sharing knowledge with graziers and potential graziers allows new graziers to get off to a good start and be successful. By connecting graziers we can realize ways to improve, become more profitable and build a peer-to-peer community of practice.

Measures (How we will know we have achieved this goal):

- Increase in acres converted to pasture.
- Increase in number of local and regional pasture walks.
- Increase in attendees at conference and pasture walks.
- Increase in website traffic.
- Feedback from conference attendees - Have they implemented things from the conference? Did they get what they needed?

Strategic Actions
<p>Strive to continually improve the annual conference.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Survey experienced graziers to find out why some are no longer coming to the annual conference and what to do to bring them back. ● Identify efforts to bring them back.
<p>Increase number of pasture walks.</p>
<p>Find willing speakers to speak at pasture walks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Invite experienced graziers to be speakers; get experienced graziers to present.
<p>Update and maintain GrassWorks website with viable information available 24/7.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Add new page under resource tab on website for specifics on “How to conduct a Pasture Walk”. ● Create a forum on website to help establish grazing focus/discussion groups. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Helpful to have accountability, closed group, and confidentiality. ● Track traffic on the website using Google Analytics.
<p>Increase social media platforms and posts.</p>
<p>Reach out to organizations such as Professional Dairy Producers of Wisconsin.</p>

Organize local workshops in winter as well as the annual conference.
Cultivate interest among growers to meet one another (e.g. previous Woody Lane tour).
Create mentoring program - match experienced grass fed beef farmers with new/inexperienced grass fed beef farmers.
Continue to encourage local grazing networks. Encourage them to help start-ups.
Partner with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Farm Services Agency, Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP), Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR), County Conservation offices, regional Resource, Conservation & Development organizations (RC&Ds), and those involved with farming to make sure that they can connect aspiring graziers with available resources (including any available lands).

3.) Motivate people to be graziers.

By demonstrating that managed grazing farming practices provide for secure agribusiness through less risk and safety in diversity, we can motivate more farmers to consider the transition. In particular, we can show potential graziers the economic benefits of grazing which we feel will provide the most effective incentive for adopting managed grazing practices. GrassWorks, its members and potential members can help to define managed grazing practices. How can you as a grazer maximize the benefits of grazing your pastures?

Measures (How we will know we have achieved this goal):

- Increase in acres converted to pasture.
- Increase in number of local and regional pasture walks.
- Increase in attendees at conference and pasture walks.
- Increase in membership.

Strategic Actions
Get testimonials from farmers who have made the conversion to grass fed.
Invite journalists, historians and students to interview farmers in their region, and record and produce their stories.
Try to organize farmers in small local cooperatives in order to pool high quality milk and sell to processors.
Help drive the market in order to increase demand.
Strive to brand grass-fed to increase demand of those products. "GrassWorks Brand".
Develop more specialty markets instead of trying to compete with large retailers. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Finding other farmers to develop the market; strength in numbers.
Work to be a place for people who are interested in grazing to connect and gain information.
Work with experts on economics of grazing and share results/findings.
Continue to improve the annual conference.
Increase social media platforms and posts.

4.) Encourage a market-driven style of conservation agriculture.

A profitable and sustainable grazing system requires combining productivity with natural resource management.

Measures (How we will know we have achieved this goal):

- Land (acres) converted from conventional to managed grazing.
- Articles published that explain the economic advantages of grazing.
- Increase in consumer demand and consumption of grass-fed products.
- Increase in managed grazing systems in areas like Viroqua where we see outdoor recreation and a strong local economy.

Strategic Actions
Continue working with experts on economic analyses.
Author articles and presentations that explain economic benefits of grazing.
Help with marketing. Quote a source raising one grass-fed animal - use that in their marketing.
Work with food marketers and producers to determine realistic goals and expectations about product quality. Endorse standards and clarify terminology for consumers.
Compile existing economic data as may be needed.
Partner to organize consumer pasture walks and environmental pasture walks.
Promote and expand Grazing Ambassadors Program.
Increase social media platforms and posts.
Seek and find scientific, peer-reviewed documentation that grass-fed products are truly healthier to eat.

5.) Be a unified voice with farm groups and policy makers promoting the benefits of grass-based farming.

By becoming a unified voice with farm groups and legislature that grass farming is good we can forge partnerships with legislators who will participate and work with those who care.

Measures (How will you know you have achieved this goal?):

- Expand partnerships with conservation groups, land trusts, and stewardship networks.
- Expand partnerships with government groups and quasi-government groups such as regional planning commissions.
- Increase annual memberships.

Strategic Actions
Work with Angie Sullivan (DATCP), Mary Anderson (WDNR), Brian Pillsbury (NRCS) and other agency personnel involved with managed grazing practices.
Maintain active membership with National Sustainable Ag Coalition, Fish and Wildlife Service, BLM, etc.
Personally invite legislators to actively participate with GrassWorks events and activities such as pasture walks.
Book booths at conservation conferences such as the Wisconsin Wetlands Association Conference.
Grant membership status to conference attendees (included in cost of the conference).
Partner with County Land Conservation, Planning and with University of Wisconsin Extension (UWEX) Staff.
Increase social media platforms and posts.
Review and explain to our partners how managed grazing operations perform with respect to agricultural nonpoint-source pollution performance standards in Wisconsin.

Implementation and Strategy Reassessment

This document identifies GrassWorks' current sense of direction during the timeframe of this plan. It is expected that GrassWorks will continue to operate with a small staff, rely on active board members and other volunteers, and pursue a range of funding opportunities to support these efforts.

The plan also represents the commitment of the GrassWorks Board of Directors, advisors and staff to think, act, and learn strategically. Among updates routinely shared during meetings of the GrassWorks Board of Directors, board members, advisors and staff may note how various efforts relate to strategic goals and actions. Measures of progress toward goals will be summarized as part of GrassWorks' annual report. As new information, experiences, circumstances, perspectives, challenges and opportunities emerge over the course of efforts, it is acknowledged that the plan may be updated at the discretion of the Board of Directors.

At times when GrassWorks Board Members, advisors and staff are identifying particular near-term next steps, they may make a point to dedicate some time during board meetings to freely brainstorm a wide range of action ideas (*what could we do?*) before discussing their merits (*what should we do?*) and committing to selected next steps (*what will we do?*).

Appendix

Identified Potential Resources, Involvement, Obstacles and Partners

1.) Raise awareness about grazing - “What is managed grazing?”

What resources are needed?

- Funding for an outreach specialist.

Who else needs to be involved?

- Grazing Ambassadors
 - Recruit more Ambassadors to schedule and complete speaking engagements.
- Health professionals who see the health benefits of eating quality food products.
- Professionals who participate in outreach such as “Ted Talks”.
- Vocational agriculture teachers.
- Consumers who will be the force that drives the demand for grass-fed products.
- Animal welfare protection organizations

What obstacles might interfere, and what is planned to overcome them?

- Misconceptions concerning managed grazing practices and techniques.
- Lack of funding for outreach and educational programming.

Partners

1. GrassWorks will continue to enlist sponsors and seek broader financial support to meet the annual conference costs and to attract a broader variety of conference attendees, including under-served populations.
2. GrassWorks and its agency partners will develop a Train-the-Trainer program which will provide ongoing professional development for agency staff to become knowledgeable and comfortable with managed grazing. We encourage agencies to assign one, or preferably two, agency staff to act as liaisons to each grazing network.
3. GrassWorks will continue to work with grazing networks to support local organization and the promotion of pasture walks and other network activities.
4. GrassWorks will partner with grazing networks, agencies and other stakeholders to share guest speakers and other resources for our common benefit.

2.) Share knowledge with graziers and potential graziers. Connect graziers.

What resources are needed?

- Places (venues)
- Committed people
- Educators, organizers & facilitators
- DATCP funding
- Funding for vets programs
- Funding for outreach specialist

Who else needs to be involved?

- Extension agents to help promote and organize pasture walks.
- RC&D's
- DATCP
- Veterans
- Technical Colleges

What obstacles might interfere, and what is planned to overcome them?

- Funding - Federal earmarks that historically helped to fund pasture walks have disappeared.
- Existing small dairy operators are now fewer in number, yet there are many new farmers who need start-up assistance.
- Lack of government programs that promote the growing of grass verses several government programs promoting the growing of corn and beans.

Partners

1. GrassWorks will work with agency partners to develop and maintain the Grazier's Gateway as well as providing content and links to other related resources.
2. GrassWorks will fully support the efforts of Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship Program and its Board of Directors for the efforts to maintain, expand, and secure this program and future funding.
3. GrassWorks will promote availability of managed grazing technical assistance for all farmers. This effort will include a diverse stream of funding from county, state, federal, and private sources. We plan to work with existing Grazing Specialists and/or Certified

Crop Advisors to ensure trained professionals are available to assist producers to develop and implement grazing plans.

3.) Motivate people to be graziers.

What Information is needed?

- Can be a low cost producer.
- Banker advice not disparaging to low-income production.
- No correlation with size.
- “Organic” label being compromised yet is specialty interest.
- Testimonials and case studies.

What resources are needed?

- Participation in enterprise groups.
- Funding for outreach specialist.

Who else needs to be involved?

- Knowledgeable bankers.
- Cooperative developments.

What obstacles might interfere, and what is planned to overcome them?

- Financial institutions don’t support the idea of grass-fed practices. It is more difficult for new grass-fed grazers to obtain funding.
- In some areas, farmers cannot find places to ship their milk because they do not produce milk at the high level of conventional farmers.
- Lack of funding to plan and execute strategic actions.

Partners

1. GrassWorks will work with the grazing networks to incorporate community building activities into pasture walks and workshops.

4.) Encourage a market-driven style of conservation agriculture.

What resources are needed?

- Economic data
- Marketing data
- Funding

Who else needs to be involved?

- Economic Experts
- Marketers
- Practicing graziers
- Grazing Ambassadors

What obstacles might interfere, and what is planned to overcome them?

- Lack of funding to plan and execute strategic actions.

5.) Be a unified voice with farm groups and policy makers promoting the benefits of grass-based farming.

Who else needs to be involved?

- Elected officials
- County Land Conservation, Planning and UWEX Staff
- Federal, state and regional conservation agencies and organizations
- Farmers Union & Farm Bureau

Partners

1. GrassWorks will build greater understanding of, respect for, and participation in, grass-based agriculture within the larger agricultural community.
2. GrassWorks, the grazing networks, and the entire managed grazing community will develop a stronger working relationship with the local, state, and national civic groups, educational institutions, and agencies.
3. County Land Conservation, Planning and UWEX Staff.