

Pasture Walk Groups

Jack Kyle, Grazier Specialist
OMAFRA

One of the challenges of pasture management is finding sources of practical information applicable to your farm. Pasturing relies on the use of the resources available to you as an individual pasture operator. The resources will be different for each operator.

Sharing Ideas

With pasture management the use of equipment and crop inputs is relatively low, thus you are not bombarded with information on a daily basis. Finding good ideas and applying them to your farm situation requires some sleuthing and exploring. One of the best sources of information is your fellow pasture operators. Through conversation and visiting with others who are doing similar things to what you are, you have the opportunity to gain knowledge of pasture practices that may help improve your operation.

One of the ways to gather knowledge and run ideas past someone for a second opinion is to be involved in a pasture walk group. Throughout the pasturing world there are a number of these informal clubs or groups that get together on a somewhat regular basis to share ideas and discuss opportunities. These groups are informally organized around a group of like-minded individuals who are seeking new ideas and confirmation for their plans.

Establishing A Pasture Walk Group

There have been several Pasture Walk groups in Ontario over the years and I think that it is time that we got some new groups going. The opportunity to get together at someone's farm and discuss the current happenings in grass growth and livestock behavior will be of benefit to your operation.

A pasture walk group could be done as a project of one of the existing farm groups in your community. Example local groups could be the County Cattlemen's Association, Sheep Producers, Soil & Crop or Milk Producers or one of the management clubs that these organizations are supporting. Other possibilities might be the local Stewardship Council or the Conservation Authority.

Approach one of the existing agricultural organizations in your area and ask them if they would be interested in sponsoring a local grazing group as one of their projects. They could help with the initial advertising and promotion. Once the group is going, it should function on its own. If there isn't a willing organization, start a group of your own. Three or four interested people who each brought a guest would provide the starting point of 6 or 8. For the 2nd meeting, if they each brought a guest it would be 12 or 16, which would provide a good-sized group to work with. Once there is a list of interested people notices can be sent by mail, phone, email, or advertisement in the local paper.

Meeting Topics

The group could meet several times a year (or monthly), tour a pasture operation and discuss the many aspects of pasturing. Topics to discuss might include performance of species, annual forages, watering systems, fencing systems, fertility programs, rotation systems, weed control, frost seeding, reseeding, or fly and parasite control.

Resource People

There are a number of resources that you can draw on for support at your meetings. These include OMAF crop and livestock specialists, seed company reps, fertilizer dealers, fence suppliers, veterinarians, and neighboring pasture operators.

Meeting Format

Meetings can be held in the morning, afternoon or evening. Some groups include a lunch or meal as part of their activity, while others don't. It is a matter of doing what the group members wish to do.

As the group meets there will normally be interest in developing more in-depth discussion of practices. The beginners will have a different level of knowledge than the experienced members but will also bring a new perspective to the discussions. Looking at something through a different set of eyes can at times be very enlightening.

A pasture management group will provide an excellent forum to discuss the many challenges and opportunities in pasture management.