



## Monthly Newsletter - February 2026



## Growing the dairy grazing sector, together

Your monthly update from the Dairy Grazing Alliance

## Welcome to the DGA Newsletter

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Here in Michigan, snow is melting, and I am enjoying some sun as I get ready to tap those maples. Do you have your buckets ready?

Thank you for being part of the Dairy Grazing Alliance community! In this issue, we cover the release of the DGA's 2025 annual Report, celebrate our Apprentice of the Year, and provide updates on MGIC's latest educational offerings.

We also dive into the evolving market landscape for grass-fed products, changes in the U.S. dairy industry, and share recent research that could be useful for you at your farm! We hope this collection of news and insights provides valuable information to support your work as stewards of the land.

*Please send us your news and comments. We would love to highlight awards, successes, grants, activities, media coverage, classes you would like MGIC to develop, etc. Please send your news to Jessica Duran. ([jessica@dga-national.org](mailto:jessica@dga-national.org)) and if you want to share this Newsletter with someone use [this link!](#)*

## DGA Update

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After an exceedingly cold and snowy start to the winter, all signs are finally starting to point towards **Spring**. The **Eastern Phoebe**s finally returned to our farm this past weekend, signaling the quiet shift from the depth of winter towards the beginnings of spring. The **sap has started to flow** through our maples and, if you listen closely, you can hear life slowly returning to the landscape. And, just as we move from one season to the next on the farm, so do we move through seasons at DGA. After a long winter of planning and preparing, we are growing excited for the grazing season.



At DGA, we are busy getting ready for the **2026 Grazing Season** and all of our pasture projects. This year, we are especially focused on **precision grazing technologies** with plenty of opportunities for our Mentors and Apprentices to become engaged. The **Conservation Innovation Grant - On Farm Trials** project offers a chance for producers who are transitioning land into managed grazing to quantify the environmental, social, and financial benefits of the system. The **Advancing Markets for Producers Program** – previously the Partnership for Climate Smart Commodities – is relaunching this grazing season with a focus on using **satellite technologies** and **milk nutrient density testing** on farms that have used managed grazing for many years. If you're interested in participating with either of these programs, feel free to reach out to **Ashley Hughes** ([ashley@dga-national.org](mailto:ashley@dga-national.org)) or **Sarah Ficken** ([sarah@dga-national.org](mailto:sarah@dga-national.org)) for more information.

In addition to those large projects, we are also continuing **pasture measurement work** on farms across Wisconsin and will also be launching a **pilot project** to understand how **virtual fencing** coupled with above ground biomass measurement can improve farm productivity and profitability and labor efficiency. Over the course of the grazing season, there will be many opportunities to gather both virtually and in person to learn more about the results of all of these projects and to understand how to adapt the technologies onto your farm. With so many exciting pasture projects going on this summer, we are definitely looking forward to watching the snow melt and the pastures green up.

**Sarah Ficken**  
Grant Project Manager

# 2025 Annual Report

## ANNUAL REPORT



## 2025

The Dairy Grazing Alliance is pleased to share its **2025 Annual Report**. The report highlights a year of meaningful growth, adaptation, and continued commitment to managed dairy grazing across the United States. It provides detailed updates on DGA's programs, partnerships, and progress across four key areas: farmer education, grazing data and insights, market development, and organizational capacity.

We invite farmers, mentors, partners and friends of DGA to explore the work that shaped 2025 and the foundation being built for the years ahead.

[Read the 2025 Annual Report here.](#)

## FEATURED STORY

### Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship Announces the 2025 Apprentice of the Year

The DGA is proud to announce that **Ursula Reid** has been named the 2025 Apprentice of the Year.

Ursula is currently in her second year of Apprenticeship at Grassway Organics in East Troy, Wisconsin, under the Mentorship of farm owner Chaz Self. She was nominated for her outstanding work ethic, passion for the craft, and deep care for the animals in her charge.



Ursula Reid

[Read the article here](#)



# MANAGED GRAZING

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## INNOVATION CENTER



### Fundamentals on Bovine Reproduction Course

Join Natalia Hincapie and gain a foundational understanding of bovine reproduction and endocrinology. This course covers everything from anatomy and hormonal control to fertility, disorders, and the latest precision technologies.

**From February 11 to March 25, 2026**  
**6:00 PM EST/ 5:00 PM CST**  
**1 hour a week live online sessions**

[Register Now](#)



### Dairy Grazing Technical Assistance Training

Are you a technical assistance provider working with dairies in the Great Lakes region?

Join the Dairy Grazing Alliance and the Wallace Center for a FREE, virtual Dairy Grazing Technical Assistance Training designed for TA providers with some experience in grazing planning who want to strengthen their skills and better support dairy producers.

#### Who should attend:

- Technical assistance providers based in the Great Lakes
- Professionals with some experience in grazing planning
- Advisors working with dairy operations that are or would like to incorporate grazing

**From Wednesday, March 18 to April 18**  
**2:00 to 4:00 P.M. EST**  
**Virtual Sessions**  
**FREE**

[Apply Here by February 25](#)

Questions? Contact Jane Jordan  
at [jane.jordan@winrock.org](mailto:jane.jordan@winrock.org)



# Graze

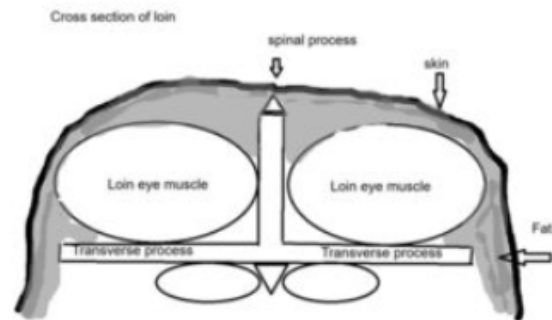
*The magazine that is by graziers, for graziers*

## A no-records method for ewe flock selection

*A niche of beef, lamb, and pizza*

**By Janet McNally**

A flock needs continual pruning to keep it at optimum productivity. There are many ways to go about identifying unproductive animals depending on the size of the flock and whether or not you are keeping records.



This month I am going to address strategies you can use with a commercial flock without keeping records.

### Assessing the flock

Every flock should be brought through the chute within a month after weaning to evaluate body condition, FAMACHA score, teeth, udder health, and production status.

It is best to do this shortly after weaning, as it is important to be able to establish whether the ewe is dry or has been lactating.

Make sure all the teeth are present on older ewes and that the teeth are solid, not loose. Tooth status is especially important going into winter as a ewe with poor teeth will have more difficulty pulling hay out of tight bales or grazing stubble on pasture when winter grazing.

To see this article in full, order the specific [back issue](#) you are interested in or [subscribe here](#). This article appeared in the February 2026 issue of Graze.

February 2026 Graze - summary of articles in the issue:

- An organic grazing dairy goes seasonal
- A no-records method for ewe selection
- Starting a direct-marketing farm newsletter
- Grassfed panel talks financials

# Grazing Insights: Research and Practical Strategies

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## Preparing for the 2026 grazing season

With Spring approaching, now is the critical window for pasture preparation. **Emily Hornberger**, recommends in an [article from Farm and Dairy](#), this structured approach: begin by reflecting on last year's performance identifying bare spots, weed issues, and signs of overgrazing. If it has been more than three years since the last soil test, get one done before making any seeding, fertilizer, or weed control decisions. For farmers in the eastern United States, the **frost seeding window** opens in February and extends through early March, depending on species and location.

**Frost seeding** can be a high-return, low-equipment practice for improving perennial pastures when done correctly. [This article from the University of Wisconsin](#), reports that frost seeding clover, especially red clover, into meadow fescue produced the greatest gains in forage yield, clover content and nitrogen contribution compared with no-till drilling. This could be an option for you if you want to boost forage and nitrogen availability but have limited access to heavier no-till drilling equipment.

## The Ideal Cow for Pasture-Based Systems

An invited review by [D.P. Berry, published in JDS Communications \(January 2026\)](#), outlines the eight characteristics of the ideal grazing dairy cow. Here they are in simple terms:

- 1. Excellent reproductive efficiency and longevity:** She needs to get pregnant easily and stay healthy for many years. Because pasture growth follows the seasons, she must be able to have a calf at the same time every year to keep the farm running smoothly.
- 2. A Healthy Appetite for Grass:** She should be motivated to eat large amounts of grass and be very efficient at turning that grass into milk and meat.
- 3. High Output per Acre:** Instead of just looking at how much one cow produces, the goal is to have a cow that allows you to produce the most milk and meat possible from every acre of land.
- 4. Excellent health:** She should be resistant to common illnesses. In a pasture system, cows walk a lot and deal with changing weather, so they need to be sturdy.
- 5. Easy care:** She should be easy to manage with minimal help from you. This includes things like being easy to milk, having a good temperament, and giving birth without needing assistance.
- 6. Low environment footprint:** The ideal cow should have a smaller "environmental footprint," meaning she produces less methane and uses nitrogen more efficiently.
- 7. Tough and Resilient:** Since weather and grass quality can change quickly outdoors, she needs to be "robust", able to handle these changes without getting sick or stop producing milk.
- 8. Produces High-Quality Calves:** Her calves should be well-suited for the meat market, meaning they can grow quickly and reach the right weight for sale eating mostly grass with minimal supplementation.

Ultimately, farmers must be very careful to choose breeds and genetics specifically designed for a life on grass. Choosing the right genetics is the only way to make sure the cow fits the farm.

## Market News and Industry Trends

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### The State of U.S. Dairy

The U.S. dairy industry is undergoing a profound structural transformation. Wisconsin, historically America's Dairyland, has **lost 76% of its dairy farms** since the mid-2010s, declining from over 15,900 operations to fewer than 6,000. Yet total milk production has not declined, reflecting a consolidation toward larger operations.

Nationally, **39% of U.S. dairies have disappeared** since 2017, according to the USDA's 2022 Census of Agriculture, which recorded a drop from 40,336 to 24,470 farms with milk sales.

### Grass-Fed and Organic Beef Market Consolidation

One of the most significant developments in the grass-fed and organic sector this year is the **acquisition of Organic Prairie and Mighty Organic brands by Thousand Hills Lifetime Grazed**, announced on January 21, 2026. Organic Prairie, established in 1996, was the first large-scale, farmer-owned organic meat program in the United States. The combined entity now works with over 50 family farms, has transitioned more than one million acres to regenerative practices, and holds certifications from both the American Grassfed Association and Audubon's Conservation Ranching program. Thousand Hills is already the number-one full-program grass-fed beef brand in the natural retail channel. [Read more here.](#)

## Upcoming Events

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- Northeast Dairy Innovation Summit March 10 -11, 2026 | Albany, NY
- High Plains Dairy Conference 2026. March 3-4, 2026 | Amarillo, Texas
- Great Lakes Forage & Grazing Conference. March 19, 2026 | Clare, Michigan

## Share Your Story with the DGA Community

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We want to hear from you! Do you have a success story, upcoming event, research findings, or innovative practice you'd like to share with fellow dairy graziers? We're always looking for content that can benefit our community.

We'd love to feature:

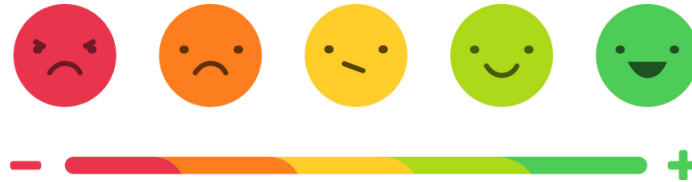
- Farm success stories and lessons learned
- Upcoming conferences, field days, or educational events
- New research or publications relevant to dairy grazing

- Innovative grazing practices or technologies
- Questions you'd like us to address in future newsletters

Submit your suggestions, stories, or events to Jessica Duran at [jessica@dga-national.org](mailto:jessica@dga-national.org)

Your contributions help make this newsletter a valuable resource for the entire dairy grazing community!

**Help us make the DGA Newsletter even better!** Your feedback is invaluable in helping us create content that truly serves the dairy grazing community. This survey takes about 3-5 minutes to complete. [Survey](#)



## Support DGA

Get involved!! Dairy Grazing Alliance is training a new generation of dairy farmers who utilize regenerative practices to revitalize rural communities, protect the environment, and produce nutrient-dense dairy products.



*Thank you for being part of the Dairy Grazing Alliance community. Together, we're building a more sustainable and profitable future for dairy grazing.*



*This newsletter was compiled in February 2026. For the most current information, please visit our website or contact us directly.*

[www.dga-national.org](http://www.dga-national.org)

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