Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship
Backgrounder

The Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship is making dairy farming a reality for a new generation. Housed within the Dairy Grazing Alliance, the Apprenticeship supports the transfer of farming wisdom from one generation to the next. It is a paid Apprenticeship that is registered with the U.S. Department of Labor. It is the first formal agricultural Apprenticeship in the nation.

Since the Apprenticeship was founded in 2010, it has provided more than 750,000 hours of on-farm training and related coursework in grass-based, or managed grazing, dairy production to hundreds of aspiring farmers located in 17 states nationwide. These states include Iowa, Illinois, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, Minnesota, New Jersey, New Hampshire, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Vermont, Virginia, and Wisconsin.

The Apprenticeship partners with established grazing dairy farmers, universities, community-based organizations, and other stakeholders to deliver high-quality, work-based training in grass-based dairy production.

This formal training program seeks to address a major challenge facing America's dairy farms. The average age of U.S. farmers is 59, which means farmers are aging out of the profession. Oftentimes, there is no clear succession plan for existing farms, and new farmers are not entering the profession at rates that offset the loss of retiring producers.

The rapid consolidation and capital requirements of the dairy industry, coupled with markets designed for large-scale production, make it difficult for new farmers to enter the business. Consequently, farm loss – estimated at 5 to 10 percent annually – persists across rural communities.

The Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship provides a guided pathway to independent dairy farm ownership, developing grazing careers, and strengthening the economic and environmental well-being of rural communities and the dairy industry.