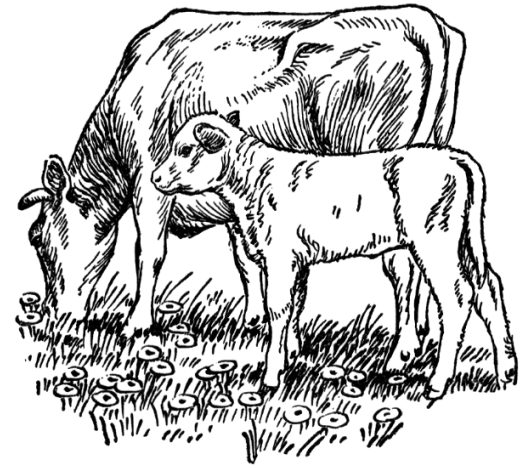


Pasture News

LaGrange County Soil & Water Conservation District
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The 2025 October Pasture Walk will be held on **10/09/25** at the
Melvin Helmuth Farm, 276 beech Road Nappanee, IN 46550.

Hours 1-3pm. Please call the LaGrange County
SWCD if you need a ride 260-463-3166 x3.



September 2025 Pasture Walk/Shepherd's Campfire

September 2025 Shepherd's Campfire/Rotational Grazing Pasture Walk was held on Monday evening, September 8, 2025, at the Lavon and Neva Lambright Farm on CR 43 in eastern Elkhart County. The group of around 48 producers met on a beautiful, clear evening in weather that felt like early fall, with temperatures in the low 60's and by nightfall, upper 50's. After the heat and humidity of June and July this year, such conditions sure are refreshing! Lavon and Neva moved to this 48 ½ acre farm in the Spring of 2021. Their family now also includes their four daughters, ages 8, 4, 3 and 5 months. They started grazing Katahdin ewes, and have gradually introduced Dorper genetics into their flock over the last 4 years. Currently, they are grazing about 80 ewes and 2 rams. Lambs, born in spring (mid-May and later) are raised and marketed in late fall through the Shipshewana Auction. Besides grazing sheep, Lavon also works off the farm in the RV industry, and operates two 1,100 head fat hog finishing barns. Lavon likes grazing sheep, something that he says works well with their family lifestyle. Soil on the Lambright family farm tends to be of heavy clay, and the farm is not tile drained, but Lavon didn't mention that drainage posed a particular problem. After watching a basketball game involving some of the young fellows in attendance, the program started with announcements. There was a reminder that the 2026 Northern Indiana Grazing Conference will be held February 6 and 7 at the MEC again this year, and Saturday will run a full schedule of topics and speakers for sheep graziers. After distributing aerial maps and information sheets for the farm, the group walked southeast past the hog finishing houses towards Field number 4. Lavon talked about his hay making practices, baling excess forage in the spring into wet wrap, and later in the summer making



dry hay as conditions allowed. We started the walking tour of the farm at the southernmost end in Field 5, which Lavon uses as horse pasture. Occasionally, he has also grazed sheep there as well. This field was clipped 30 days ago to keep weed growth to a minimum. Heading back north, the group toured the largest field on the farm, Field 4 (19 acres). Originally this was seeded for hay before the Lambright's moved onto the farm. Lavon has maintained soil fertility using hog manure from the finishing barns and a commercial fertilizer called Mycorr Plus. Mycorr, according to promotional information, is a product that "gives soil microorganisms the tools to flourish. Mycorr helps break down chemicals, remediate salts, and remove harmful pathogens in the soil." Lavon feels that the alfalfa content in this field has actually increased since he has been on the farm without renovation. Lavon, in his rotational management, tries to leave 30-40 days of recovery time before revisiting a paddock. The grass/alfalfa mix in this field was about knee-high, exhibiting some red clover as well and a lot of purple flowers

showing on the alfalfa. The further we walked to the east, the denser the growth became. The flock was grazing in an area on the south end of Field 4. The ewes, some with smaller lambs that had been born later, grazed alongside 3 Jersey steers (about 400 lbs. ea.) that the family uses for their own beef. Lavon was asked about his rate of multiple births. He responded that this year he had had 42 sets of twins and 5 sets of triplets with the rest being single births (out of 80 ewes total). He would like to get a better percentage of multiples if possible, and also feels that he could increase the number of ewes sustained on the farm from 80 up to 130 or 150 with good management practices. He noted that lamb survival rate this past year was about 90%, which he felt to be satisfactory. Lambing is done outside from mid-May on. This year, Lavon felt like he had needed to assist in lambing more often than in the past. When asked about a guard dog, Lavon responded that he had tried one, but it had not worked well; the dog he had was not well trained. During lambing, Lavon walks the field where the ewes are grazing at least once a day. He bands buck lambs right away unless they are smaller or struggling, then gives them a few days. He also tags ewe lambs at the same time. Parasites are always a concern for sheep graziers. With a long recovery interval on paddocks, Lavon feels he has a good handle on parasite control. In obvious cases, he culls the herd of ewes that are susceptible to parasites. He does not worm his animals except in case of a need with lambs going to market. He watches for hoof problems, but does not normally trim hooves, and has not had problems with hoof rot. Lambs destined for market are fed soyhull and corn to supplement their grazing. Water is supplied to the flock using a large plastic tote equipped with a gravity water valve feeding a small watering trough. Sheep are notorious for not requiring a lot of water compared to say, cattle. This system seems to be adequate. Paddocks are fences with a three horizontal wire system; a single back wire is used to keep the sheep off of areas already grazed. He uses a Speedright 3000 charger and an 8 Joule charger for exterior fence. A mineral feeder was set up near the water tank. Lavon free choice feeds minerals Purina Wind-and-Rain, a bicarbonate to guard against bloat, and Pops mineral.





Another common concern with shepherds is predation. When asked, Lavon mentioned that he has not had a problem so far. Coyotes have caused problems for other graziers, as have feral or neighborhood dogs and, it was mentioned, in the southern part of Indiana, some sheep and even cattle graziers have encountered issues with invasive black vultures. It was mentioned by the group that foxes have even caused problems with sheep. While still in the area with the sheep, Lavon demonstrated the skills of his border collie. He may not have had success with a guard animal, but Max (the border collie) was obviously trained to perfection, rounding up the flock, moving them from one place to another, and holding off or laying down when needing to back off. Lavon and Max appear to have a perfect working relationship. Lavon uses both hand and voice signals to get Max to move the sheep in the desired direction. Max was

trained by Dean Yoder, a local breeder and trainer and incidentally, Myron's brother who is active in the Shepherd's Campfire organization. The group moved north and back west toward the farm buildings. Walking across Field 3, Lavon mentioned that this area, bounded to the north and east by a surface ditch and forested areas, makes a good sheltered out-wintered area. 28 days before the Pasture Walk Lavon had clipped this field, again for weed control, and applied hog manure for fertilizer. He plans to graze this field again in November, but hopes we get some significant rain before that time, since the dry conditions are a concern. Discussing hay again, Lavon mentioned that he prefers wet wrap to dry hay. He feels that it has better palatability with his sheep; they clean it up much better rather than scattering it around and wasting it as they tend to do with dry. Noticing a couple of bull thistles, Lavon related that he cuts them down with a cordless hognose saw and hauls them away on a skid loader. A small "saltbox" shed in Field 1 provides the farm with a sorting facility. Lavon took part of this structure down to increase the size of this grazing field. This area exhibited lush growth of grass and clover. Some market lambs were grazing on the north side of this building; Lavon markets them between 50 and 60 lbs. usually in late November and early December. Looking at a problematic weed in this field led to a discussion; the weed was identified as an ivy, "pea vine" or some kind of morning glory. Most sheep graziers present were familiar with this plant, agreeing that sheep, and especially goats, would clean it up when grazing where it was present. The concern is that weeds are invasive in nature, growing in a dense mat along the ground and crowding out more valuable forage species. The vines were shown to grow in a tight twist around other plants. Seed seems to be carried by birds, as it can spring up anywhere. Finally, someone positively identified it as "Bind Weed", and indeed, a member of the morning glory family. Our last stop was in a rented field across the road where Lavon had some replacement ewes grazing. He improves the genetics of his flock by close observation, culling animals with undesirable characteristics



and tagging and retaining ewes that show positive traits. At this point, the group returned back to the farm shop where we had started for a snack comprised of cookies, coffee, pop, water and chips. After a short break of around 20 minutes, the group settled down on benches to listen to our speaker for the evening, Vernon Lambright of L&M Ag, Topeka IN. Vernon started by announcing to the group of his topic for the evening, regenerative agriculture. Regenerative Ag has become a "hot" topic in the last several years. It is based on the idea that we are put here on this earth with a mission of being good stewards of God's creation. Vernon thanked the Shepherd's Campfire organization, Myron Yoder and LaGrange County SWCD for an opportunity to speak.



Regenerative agriculture is important, especially now, because as Vernon observed, we are forced to feed more and more people in today's world on less and less land. Recent high calf and produce prices are notable, but, Vernon said, they should have always been that way as valuable commodities that require a lot of work, time and management to produce. Sheep are a resource that until recently were underdeveloped and underappreciated, at least in our local area. Years ago, Vernon said, sheep were kept almost as pets because they were "cute". He appreciated being involved in the evenings program, and mentioned that he had learned a lot about sheep that he didn't know before. Vernon pointed out that "rotational grazing" and "intensive grazing" may be related, but are not necessarily the same thing. "Rotational Grazing" came into this area first. "Intensive Grazing" followed later, being implemented in many parts of the World out of necessity because resources were severely limited. According to Vernon, both systems improve farm productivity by improving soil

health, fertility and taking advantage of natural principles, working with nature instead of striving against it. The longer you intensively graze, the better conditions become in soil condition and fertile productivity. Intensive grazing encourages more diversified growth, clovers and forbes by trampling the grasses especially when grazed harder. Vernon mentioned that the single most important component of intensive grazing is the back wire. This followed along with what Lavon had pointed out in his pastures quite well. Rotational and intensive grazing relies upon the rest period that the grazer provides to his paddocks. Weeds and poor forages can't stand mowing or grazing, while good grasses love to be mowed or grazed, and flourish under it. As dead weeds and poor forages die, they decompose and increase organic matter, which in turn benefits that soil and enables it to be more highly productive. Another advantage of intensive grazing is in a prolonged productive season. This of course is also dependent upon weather and climatic conditions, but in general, starting grazing early in the spring is beneficial for forage growth and stimulates early gain in livestock condition. Intensive grazing also helps to eliminate cycles by moving the



lead wire before grass gets too short, since larvae live in the bottom 1-2 inches. Proper rest periods of at least 30-day cycles will regenerate better regrowth. Vernon feels that grazing paddocks should be grazed short at least once per season. This will encourage root die-back, and help to build organic matter in the soil. Farmers have long noted high alfalfa seed prices. A particular problem with alfalfa is that it cannot be interseeded or renovated since it exhibits allelopathic characteristics; an "old" growth of alfalfa will attack a "young" growth of alfalfa. Usually, to get a stand of alfalfa renewed, one must start all over again. Vernon noted that in one of Lavon's fields, alfalfa seemed to have gradually increased without any intervention. This is understandable when considering that in this field, the alfalfa has been allowed to come to full bloom, thus naturally regenerating itself, while the application of hog manure has filled the fertility gap. Vernon also mentioned here the concern of a micronutrient,

sulfur, and its importance in healthy plant growth. Sulfur used to be supplied in the environment by the burning of coal in electrical generation plants, but in the last couple of decades, emissions have eliminated coal burning operations, eliminating this micronutrient source. Now, for healthy crop and forage growth, sulfur must be applied though deliberate, appropriate level applications. Lastly, Vernon instructed the group on the importance of appropriate levels of protein and nutrition in the diet. Ewes, he said, should be kept trim to aid in lambing. A leaner diet with more grass and limited protein is better for pregnant ewes. He cautioned against too rich an intake in the gestation period. Higher protein will make more milk, but in gestation, will make for bigger offspring and increase the chances for problems during lambing. The discussion was concluded with questions and answers. The first question dealt with composting of manure. Does proper composting eliminate parasitic larvae? Vernon answered by saying that as long as the manure is properly composted and turned and its core temperature reaches at least 160° F, this is the case that larvae will be destroyed. The second question related to lambing problems. Lavon Lambright, our host farmer for the evening, noted that too much protein in the ewe's diet leads to larger offspring at birth, which can also result in calcium deficiency. This dovetailed quite well with Vernon's comments on livestock diet. The meeting was adjourned a little after 8:00 pm. Altogether, this was an enjoyable evening for everyone in attendance. The next Shepherd's Campfire will be held at the Shipshewana Auction Barn on Monday, December 8, 2025. The last SWCD Pasture Walk of 2025 will be at the Melvin Helmuth Farm near Nappanee on October 9, 2025. Our thanks to Lavon and Neva for hosting the September program!

