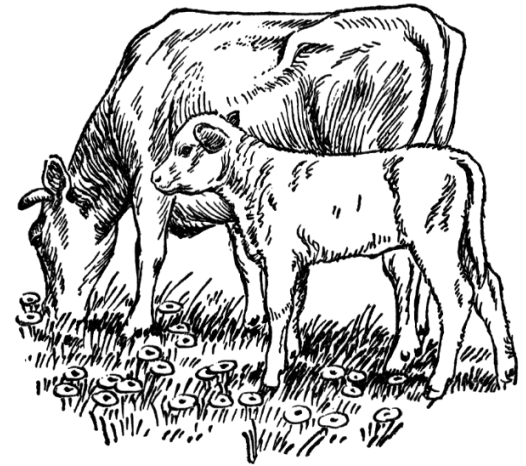


# Pasture News

LaGrange County Soil & Water Conservation District  
910 South Detroit Street  
LaGrange, IN 46761  
(260) 463-3166 ext. 3  
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The 2025 September Pasture Walk (Shepherd's Campfire) will be held on **Monday September 8th** at Lavon Lambright's Farm 65080 CR 43 Millersburg, IN 46543.

The topic will be on Sheep Grazing  
Hours 6:00pm to 8:30pm. Please call the LaGrange County SWCD if you need a ride 260-463-3166 x3.



Our August 2025 Pasture Walk was held on the Phillip and Lora Whetstone farm near Goshen, IN. Phillip has hosted a Pasture Walk in the past, and has been a regular attendee at our rotational grazing pasture walks and the Northern Indiana Grazing Conference for many years. The event was held on Thursday, August 14, a hot sunny and humid day; the type of day we have become quite used to this summer! We had 34 in attendance for the Walk. This is Phillip's home farm, having been owned and operated by the Whetstone family for 5 generations. Phillip and Lora have three children aged 14, 18 and 20. The youngest is still in school, the two older work away from home but help on the farm when needed, especially during hay making. The farm consists of 112 acres with 16 acres of woods and it straddles

Elkhart County Road 35 (50 acres are across the road). The Whetstone's certified the farm as organic in 2009, and went "all-grass" in 2020. In addition to milking 30-35 head of Holstein-Friesians, they added a 20,000-bird organic layer house to their farm in 2023 in an arrangement with Natural Family Farms. Care of this facility occupies about 3 hours of labor per day, something normally taken care of by Phil. The farm is on rolling, fairly heavy ground in central Elkhart County. It is not tile drained, but elevations keep most of the farm mostly well-drained except for Field 6 at the south end of the farm, located just north of Clinton Frame Church. We started the program by allowing everyone to introduce themselves and explain their interest in rotational grazing. Dr. Richard Sommers, a veterinarian from Silver Lake, IN began since he couldn't stay for most of the program. Dr. Sommers asked for advice on increasing productivity on an old piece of pasture that he has on his farm in Kosciusko County. Most of the field is occupied by an old Orchard Grass seeding. The land is rolling and the soil is heavy. His question to the group was 1) When? and 2) What?-when to renovate and what to plant there? There were several suggestions from the crowd. Festulolium was mentioned, as were red and white clover (but NOT, says Elvin Nuest), ladino clover! One of the group asked if tillage was an option to prepare the seed bed. No, answered Richard, as he is older and does not relish the idea of picking up stones. Ray Yoder suggested white clover and tall fescue (Dr. Sommers wants to graze beef cattle). Our host, Phil Whetstone mentioned meadow fescue as a possibility, and answered the "what?" part of the question by asserting that he prefers fall planting to spring. Following this brief discussion, we realized that we had people attending the Pasture Walk from a fairly large area including New Paris, Goshen, Starke County, La-Grange as well as other locations. After a few announcements, host farmer Phil took over the meeting. He thanked everyone for coming. Before going out to the fields, he showed the crowd some tools he found to



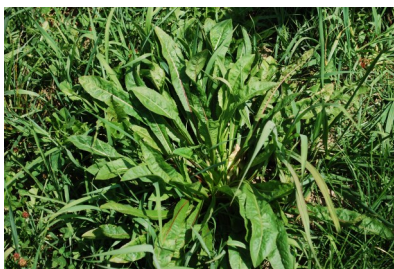
be valuable in maintaining his electric fences. He has a cordless Milwaukee weed eater with a hedge trimmer attachment. The weed eater is light and easily carried along on a trip out to the paddocks to either check fences or bring the cattle in for milking. The hedge trimmer will handle woody growth and heavier herbaceous weeds like horseweed, but requires more frequent battery charging. On the way out to the fields, Phil explained to the group that he has currently dried up his milking herd intentionally to allow for upgrades and major maintenance on his milkhous. He has a flat barn stanchion milking setup. 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> cutting hay is blown up into the existing silos on the farm as haylage; other hay is made dry or wrapped. Phil mentioned that he does buy some hay; he has decided that his cows breed back better on purchased hay.





The group walked east along the farm's central lane. Phil has set up his lane so that he can transport farm equipment down it, widening it from the original dimensions. Every paddock has a stretch gate (about every acre), and these correspond to risers in the buried water system which he installed in about 2010. Field 2 N was planted in 2009 to a custom Byron mix of ryegrass, chicory, red and white clover and alfalfa. Orchard grass was apparent, always having been present on the farm, but not actively encouraged by Phil, who prefers other forage. The forage in this field was dense, about ankle high having been grazed three time this year and clipped twice. He does not make hay in this field. Some weed pressure was present, foxtail and

patches of a type of morning glory. The group discussed how to get rid of weeds in an organic environment such as this; one person suggested planting sorghum-sudan to crowd out the weeds. Phil does plant sorghum-sudan occasionally, but prefers not to. When asked about his fertility practices, Phil responded that he spreads his own dairy manure as well as the chicken manure produced in his layer house. He tries to get as even distribution over the farm as possible. He does not regularly take soil tests; the latest soil test he shared with the group was from 2014. Asked about his lane development, Phil explained that he applied driveway gravel and number 53 crushed concrete on his lane for a base. This was done 2012-13. The lane seems to be holding up quite well. He mentioned that his cattle prefer to walk the grassed area of the lane (the part that was widened to allow for farm machinery transport) unless the weather has been wet; then, they take the gravel lane. This keeps udders cleaner for milking, and reduces the chances for problems like mastitis. The deep water system, already mentioned, makes



watering livestock and moving tanks easy. Phil related that he had installed this system in 2010 in August, which he did NOT recommend to anyone else because of hard ground. The risers are situated from 100' to 150' apart back both sides of the lane. Crossing Field 2S, was planted in 2018 to ryegrass, Red and White Clover and meadow fescue. This forage planting has not held up particularly well because it was originally planted in very wet conditions. Weed pressure appeared to be a problem in this paddock as well. When engaged in normal milking operations, Phil moves his dairy herd to new pasture every 12 hours. The group discussed the forage a bit, noticing plantain and chicory. Chicory is a bitter plant sometimes used in the American south as

a flavoring additive to coffee. Cattle seem to like it once they get used to it, but it is tough, viny and unpalatable once it heads out. At this stage it exhibits pale blue flowers. When someone pointed out a patch of horse nettle, Phil mentioned that he had not had problems with that particular weed until he started buying hay. He thinks he inadvertently imported seed with purchased hay. It was pointed out that mowing would help control this weed, but it would need to be done frequently. Organic control of weeds is indeed labor intensive and challenging! Field 3N was planted in 2009 with a similar mix as Field 2N. Also, this mix had some yarrow in it, which is still evident in this field. Yarrow has a long flowering season, is a good plant for pollinator species, and was used by native American tribes for traditional medicine. Phil had also planted sweet clover in this field initially, but it has long since faded out. Phil mentioned that he usually grazes his cattle across County Road 35 during the daytime, and in fields 2 and 3 at night on the farm side of the road. John Belork asked about magnesium levels. Boron and sulfur, other important micronutrients, were also mentioned. John feels that the application of 100 lbs. of elemental sulfur per acre would greatly increase Phil's forage production. Sulfur, once a byproduct of coal burning electrical power plants, is now largely deficient in our fields today, and needs to be replenished with regular fertilizer applications. Field 3S included ryegrass, (some Italian ryegrass here), fescue, alfalfa, and clover, seeded in 2019. The field was densely populated with an ankle high growth of dark green forage. There was some yellow on the edges of some of the alfalfa leaves, which could have been either insect damage or a boron deficiency. It was noted that the yellow discoloration was "banded" which may have also indicated a relationship between crop damage and wet/dry cycles. A tree line at the edge of this field has been there long term, and at certain times of the day can provide grazing livestock with a little relief from the hot sun.







Field 4 is Phil's horse pasture. It was grazed close, as horses have a tendency to do. It was seeded to Byron Grassworks D. Moving on to Field 5, this field contained a good 3rd cutting stand of alfalfa forage. This was standing about 18" high, and was starting to show a lot of purple flowers. When asked if he was going to bale it, Phil replied that he intended to graze it. When asked when, Phil replied "When I get to it"☺. A typical farmer's answer! The forage here is 3 year old alfalfa, which was seeded 20 pounds to the acre, along with 3 pounds of Alfa-Plus, 3 pounds of red clover, festulolium and ryegrass. The forage



exhibited a nice green color. The day of the Pasture Walk, the (dry) cattle were grazing the toe of Field 5. The first cows are supposed to freshen at the end of August, putting a deadline on the revisions going on in the milkhous. The group noticed the large buffer strip bordering the Clinton Frame Church property on the southwestern corner of the farm. Phil maintains the fence row along the walking path area owned by the church. In return, the church refrains from spraying any herbicide there that would compromise his organic status. Field 6 is also horse pasture, which is grazed tight. It was seeded to Byron Seed mix in 2006. Field 6 is the lowest elevation field on the farm, and thus is inclined to



wetness more than anywhere else on the farm. In the corner of this field is located the recreational pond, the farm get-away, so to speak. The pond is surrounded with stone, has a swing and a zip line, and is set up to provide relief from the heat. Fields 9 and 10 are on the west side of County Road 35. As mentioned before, the Whetstones graze this side of the road during the daytime, crossing the road morning and evening to do the milking. The



west side has a staging area to gather the cattle in while waiting on traffic to cross. They normally wait for daylight in the morning to cross, and cross again between 3 and 4 o'clock in the afternoon. Last fall, a truck failed to yield the right-of-way to a milk cow, and the truck came off second best in the argument. The cow, tumbled over in the ditch, was quietly grazing when Phil got to her to check her out. The pickup wasn't quite so lucky! Field 9 was seeded September 2018 to 18 pounds of alfalfa, 3 pounds of Alfa-Plus and 3 pounds of red clover. Field 10 has a similar forage. One of the pasture walkers asked Phil what he does to control flies. His first response was "I look the other way", but then seriously, he sprays Basic H and has used Jerry Brunetti's fly mix in the past. He feels that it works better than No-Fly, a popular organic product. Following this tour of the Whetstone farm, we all eagerly walked back to the shade of the farm shop where Phil's wife and daughters had prepared an excellent snack of ice cream and cake in honor of somebody's 60th birthday-I forget quite who! ☺. We thank Phil and Lora for a



wonderful pasture walk, and look forward to the Shepherd's Campfire on Monday night, September 8, 2025, on the Lavon Lambright farm near Millersburg.

