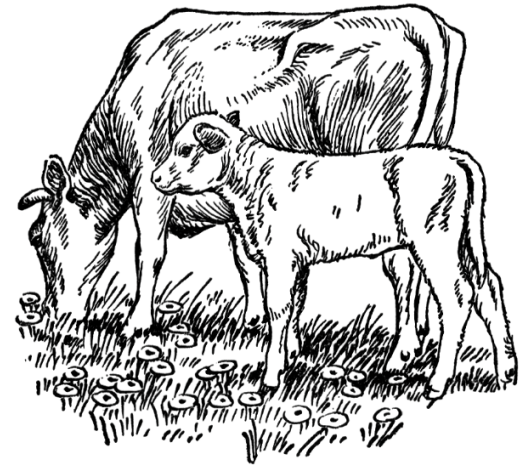


Pasture News

LaGrange County Soil & Water Conservation District
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The 2025 July Pasture Walk will be held on Thursday, July 10 from 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm on the Alvin Lambright Farm in southern LaGrange County. The Lambright family operates an organic dairy farm at 7735 S 075 W, Wolcottville, IN. Hope to see everyone there!



Our second Pasture Walk for 2025 was held on Thursday, June 12, 2025, on the Atlee and Susan Yutzy dairy farm near Nappanee, IN, but actually located across the line in Marshall County, IN on Beech Road north of US 6. Atlee has been quite an active rotational grazer for many years, having served as a Steering Committee member for the Northern Indiana Grazing Conference, and as a speaker and panel moderator for the same event. The day of the Pasture Walk was sticky, hazy with a little sun peeking through the clouds with temperatures hovering in the mid-80's. About 23 people in all attended the event, with grazi-

ers coming from as local a mile or two down the road all the way from places like Kendallville, Avilla, Hamlet, Ligonier and Albion.

Before we took off on our walking tour of the Yutzy operation, each person introduced themselves as to where they were from, and what interest they had in grazing. We had in the group beef producers, people raising horses and ponies, a Byron Seed dealer, sheep graziers, pastured pork producers, beekeepers and one farmer who operates a duck barn. So, all in all, we had a pretty diverse group of rotational graziers. Amy Renkenberger from LaGrange County SWCD invited the group to check out the wildlife food plot seed provided by Pheasants Forever and the grazing literature on the table. She also reminded the group of the upcoming Northern Indiana Grazing Conference, scheduled for February 6 and 7, 2026. It will be here before you know it!



Atlee introduced the group to his farm. This is his home place, having been in his family for three generations. Atlee and Susan have 8 children ages 29 down to 13; 5 are married and on their own, while the other three are still at home. The farm is comprised of 99 acres total, 57 acres of that tillable, with the rest in woods. The woods are used every spring to produce an average of 400 gallons of maple syrup, a significant part of the Yutzy's farm production. Their maple syrup operation is old school; they dump buckets of sap and cook syrup down over a wood fired boiler.



As far as the dairy part of the operation, Atlee transitioned to organic production in 2009. Milk was first marketed through Hood, however now Yutzy's work with Organic Valley. Before going organic, from 2004 to 2008, Atlee and his family milked seasonally, drying the cows off in January and February. They are currently milking 33 head of mostly Holstein cows, with a little Friesian genetics still represented.

Soils on the farm tend to be light, sandy loam with some heavier soils toward the east end of the property. They do have some tile drainage in place. They utilize a swing-6 Dairymaster parlor for milking. The breeding program is accomplished through both AI and a live bull. The Yutzy's raise their own replacement heifers. Byron Seeds Grassworks mixes make up the favored forages for both grazing paddocks; hay is usually a mix of alfalfa and orchard grass. Hay is usually wrapped (1st cutting) and then thereafter made dry if weather allows. Atlee raises about 25 acres of organic corn each year, most used for silage, but some picked for grain as well.



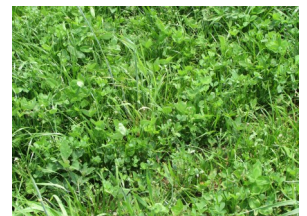
Before walking the farm, the group moved over toward the paddock where the draft animals were grazing. I say "draft animals" because very few horses were in evidence. Instead, Atlee and his son prefer draft mules, of which he currently has 7. One single Belgian mare was there, carrying a draft mule as well. After this little mule is born, the Belgian mare will stay on the Yutzy farm to raise more draft mules.

As we moved toward the fields, the group discussed trends in grazing from past to present. Rotational grazing was considered a fringe method of production in the late 1980's to about 2000, when it started to gain more widespread acceptance. Over that time, various strategies, equipment and methodologies have gained and lost favor, and the group mentioned some of these. "Tumble wheel" movable fence posts were

mentioned, as well as seasonal grazing, out-wintering of livestock, and extreme attempts at reducing overhead buildings and equipment to a bare minimum. Currently, some of these methods and means have gained widespread acceptance, while others have fallen into disfavor. The search for a balance point seems to be the natural trend in farming and everything else, too, for that matter.

The tour of the farm started in Field number 7. This field contained a new forage seeding of Grassworks plus alfalfa and red clover added in along with perennial ryegrass and white clover as well. This was seeded the last week of March of this year (2025). Soils in this field tend to be on the lighter side; the field showed nice consistent growth with lots of clover and ryegrass visible. A little cereal rye was also in evidence, which was left over cover crop from last year. The forage itself had good color, and was about ankle high. It has been grazed once this year and clipped afterward to combat a weed problem that had begun to become apparent. Atlee related that he used a no-till drill for seeding and mixes the seed in the large bin on the drill. When asked about broadcast seeding, Atlee explained that he only uses that when interseeding clover into an existing stand. Noticing a few weeds at the fenced edge of the field, the group discussed the use of weeds, including eating them or making tea, plants such as lambsquarters and nettles.

Field 6A contained a lot of meadow fescue, red clover, alfalfa and ryegrass between knee and waist high. This forage showed good color, dense consistent growth except for a few bare patches near the field entrance, probably due to soil compaction in this high traffic area. This was spring seeded in 2024; the other half of the field (6B) had been fall seeded in 2023. Asked about fertility practices, Atlee related that he uses the manure from his own farm, and also broadcasts spreads gypsum, lime and trace elements as needed.



Someone on the tour asked about Canada thistle. Does this weed indicate a nutrient deficiency or problem of soil condition? Atlee responded that actually, Canada thistle with its tap root actually helps to break up soil compaction. However, its disadvantages far outweigh any benefits it brings. The best way most were aware of to combat this noxious weed was by regularly mowing it. Cows have been observed to eat Canada thistle when it is very young. Someone else on the Walk mentioned that the book *Weed Control Without Chemicals* stated that Canada thistle could be an indicator of low calcium and low manganese levels in the soil. Another farmer knew of someone who sprayed molasses on thistles to condition the young cattle to eat them. Another good book that was mentioned in this discussion was *When Weeds Talk*.



Walking past field 4, the group got a chance to see a nice clean stand of organic corn standing 8"-10" high. On to Field 10 near the back of the farm, Atlee explained that some low spots in the field had had the forage drowned out earlier in the spring. The color of the existing forage was more yellow than he would like to see. This field, as well as Field 1 have both had thistle problems in the past. It is important when mowing to control thistles to make sure and mow before the thistle sprout seed heads to avoid spreading the problem farther.

On the day of the Pasture Walk, the dairy cows were grazing in Field 10, as already mentioned the horses and mules were grazing in Field 2 near the farm buildings. Atlee feeds free choice mineral and some minerals are mixed in with the grain ration.

As we walked up from Field 10, we discussed watering strategies. It was mentioned that a handful of barley straw can help keep a water tank clean. This will also work in farm ponds. Others talked about using appropriate amounts of hydrogen peroxide; at 30 ppm, this helps keep water tanks clean and also act as a dewormer. The water line back to Atlee's Field 10 is run along the fence row on the surface of the ground but buried by this time of the year by grass growth. This helps keep the water cooler as it shields the black water line from the sun. In the rest of his farm, water lines to paddocks are buried about one foot deep. The group inspected Atlee's water lines and quick-connect Tees incorporated at regular interval to allow for tanks to be moved from place to place.

Atlee has, as many farmers do with older barns, a large concrete tank for livestock watering. These are difficult to keep clean. One farm producer in the group related that he had good luck by cutting 330-gallon totes in half cross ways and leaving the wire cage around them (also cut) as water tanks. The valves in the bottom half of these totes make it easy to empty the tanks for cleaning.



Back at the farm buildings, the group scattered out a bit, with some guys going to take a look at the parlor and milking setup, while others gathered around under the shade trees enjoying a break from the warm sun. The Yutzy's fed us all delicious cinnamon rolls, coffee, and wonderful fresh strawberry smoothies for a snack as we spent some time in informal networking. Thanks to Atlee, Susan and the Yutzy family for hosting a very informative pasture walk this month!