

CONSERVATION INNOVATION GRANTS Final Progress Report

Grantee Name: Heifer International	
Project Title: Hands-On Training and Mentoring in Management Intensive Prescribed Grazing for Limited Resource Farmers	
Project Director: Ann Wells, DVM	
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Period Covered by Report: Final Report	
Project End Date: 3/31/08	

Summarize the work performed during the project period covered by this report:

- Conducted 3 general workshops on prescribed grazing and sustainable land management for limited resource ruminant producers from 5 states at Heifer Ranch. Forty to fifty producers in attendance in each one.
- Conducted one workshop aimed at limited resource small ruminant producers from 3 states at Heifer Ranch. Twenty producers in attendance.
- The Project Director (PD) visited farms of mentors and protégés in Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi and Oklahoma throughout the entire project.
- The PD, Heifer International Field Coordinators, mentor farmers, NRCS grazing specialists and the East Regional Technical Specialist met together at the GLCI meeting in December 2006 to evaluate activities, progress and future directions of the project.
- Mentor farmers attended the GLCI conference in December 2006.
- One protégé farmer presented at the Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group annual conference in January 2007.
- A grazing and fencing workshop for Alabama protégé farmers was conducted by Alabama mentor farmers in February 2007.
- A grazing workshop was conducted in March 2007 for 15 Oklahoma mentor and protégé farmers.
- Mentorship agreements were signed and started by farmers in Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi.
- Grazing demonstrations were started and continued in Mississippi, with a video being created by NRCS.
- Ruminant research and grazing demonstrations continued at Heifer Ranch.
- The PD held discussions with NRCS personnel in North Carolina, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Arkansas and with mentor farmers in Louisiana, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Alabama about additional assistance needed for protégé farmers.
- The PD conducted a workshop for NRCS personnel in Arkansas about how to effectively work with limited resource farmers.
- Training programs were conducted in Louisiana and Oklahoma with mentor farmers doing much of the training.

- New mentor farmers were identified, recognized and began their own mentoring at the end of this project in Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Oklahoma.

Describe significant results, accomplishments, and lessons learned.

The list of events and work done above created a great deal of change in knowledge, interest and behavior of participating producers. But much of this change didn't occur until the second full of the project. Because projects in 3 of the states did not materialize, this allowed the project to continue a third year, which turned out to be most beneficial in ensuring that these changes remained in place. This permanent change is best shown by the identification and work of the next stage of mentor farmers.

There are several things we have learned from this project, and are lessons we are currently addressing in the second phase of this important Conservation Innovation Grant.

Limited resource farmers must address a host of challenges that prevent them from making changes in their farms and lives. However, when given some resources, most importantly human resources in the form of trainers and mentors, they are eager to try new things. But even after they try these new things, they still need frequent, if not constant support to continue in these directions. This eagerness also not occur rapidly. It probably takes limited resource farmers at least twice as long to make any changes as other producers. Part of this is cultural and has to be understood. Part of it, though, is lack of support and so trust really has to be gained and this does not happen quickly.

It became evident that mentor farmers are most effective if they are in the same community as the protégé farmer. Where this wasn't possible, additional time was needed to bring the distance gap in order to develop that trust. Even with additional time, cultural differences still created some difficulties that would probably have been prevented if the mentor farmer had been in the same community. This made us realize that mentor farmers must be identified within communities and projects. This does not happen overnight and requires a lot of support from mentors, agencies and other educational entities. This kind of educational entity is lacking in so many areas where limited resource farmers are located.

NRCS personnel in all states with active mentoring relationships continue to be of great assistance. Grazing land specialists have been very helpful in working with the program director to conduct grazing workshops and work with mentor farmers on grazing plans. This has given farmers a better understanding of how NRCS can help them manage their natural resources and increase their profits. Communication channels between NRCS staff and farmers have been improved because of this project, helping erase memories of negative experiences. The East Regional Technical office has been a great source of assistance, developing fact sheets and finding other resources for farmers.

Based on findings from the last reporting period, more focused grazing workshops have been held during this reporting period. These workshops have focused only on Heifer

project partners and have been more successful than the workshops mixed with more experienced farmers. This may be due to intimidation and may be a reason limited resource farmers typically do not attend larger conferences.

We have observed that repeated meetings with protégé farmers with a set schedule of learning are very helpful. Setting goals helps protégé farmers implement different methodologies and evaluate the impact of the changes. Group discussions and pasture walks also seem to generate more interest and new ideas than individual farm visits.

Limited resource farmers who have already been trying innovative farming techniques are good role models. These farmers have started presenting at conferences and have been very well received. The PD and Heifer staff are working to get these farmers among wider audiences to present on their successes.

Heifer Ranch is an excellent location for teaching sustainable livestock production and management. The Ranch raises livestock using good grazing management and calm handling practices. The layout of the ranch is conducive to hands-on activities and demonstrations that illustrate the grazing principles being presented. Volunteers learn sustainable livestock production principles and in turn, teach others. In addition, the lodging and meal facilities make it a complete workshop location.

Most limited resource farmers participating in this project tend to fall into one of two groups – one that is ready to attend training whenever and wherever. The other group is more reluctant to leave their home county and wants all training conducted locally. This project is fortunate to have the flexibility and means to reach both audiences.

Compare actual accomplishments to the project goals in your proposal:

Project Objectives

1. Fifty beginning and limited resource graziers from eight southern states will understand the concepts of management-intensive prescribed grazing and animal well-being.
2. Limited resource, beginning graziers and experienced graziers, through the educational Heifer Ranch working model, will be able to profitably raise livestock using conservation practices that restore lands degraded from overgrazing.
3. Experienced graziers from eight states will be working with and acting as mentors for beginning, limited resource graziers in those states.

There were only 5 states with participants in them, but the total number of limited resource farmers who were taught and understand about the concepts of management-intensive prescribed grazing and animal well-being is at least 150.

Profitability has not been reached as much as hoped, but these limited resource farmers have made great strides in restoring their lands to higher levels of productivity and

understanding how to provide their livestock nutrition from their lands. Profitability should increase as time goes on.

Experienced graziers are working with limited resource and other beginning farmers in five states. Even better, those who have been mentored, are now becoming mentors themselves which will increase the transfer of information, especially since these new mentors are within the communities and projects being targeted.

Describe the work that you anticipate completing in the next six-month period:

- NA—end of project

In the space below, provide the following in accordance with the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and CIG grant agreement provisions:

a. A listing of EQIP-eligible producers involved in the project, identified by name and social security number or taxpayer identification number;

b. The dollar amount of any direct or indirect payment made to each individual producer or entity for any structural, vegetative, or management practices. Both biennial and cumulative payment amounts must be submitted.

Not applicable.

c. A self-certification statement indicating that each individual or entity receiving a direct or indirect payment for any structural, vegetative, or management practice through this grant is in compliance with the adjusted gross income (AGI) and highly-erodible lands and wetlands conservation (HEL/WC) compliance provisions of the Farm Bill.

Not applicable.