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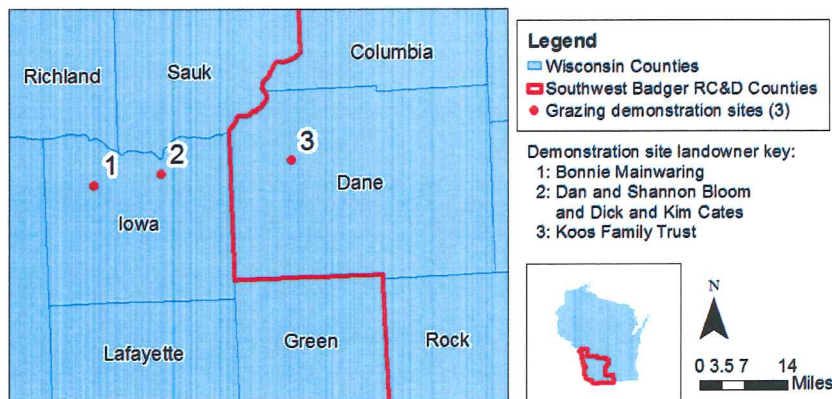
### **SOUTHWEST BADGER RC&D SELECTS 3 GRAZING DEMONSTRATION FARMS IN SW WI**

Properties selected will host demonstrations of well-managed grazing on rented land

DODGEVILLE, WI – Three sites in Southwest Wisconsin will host public examples of renting land for well-managed grazing during 2017-2019. According to Robert Bauer, Grazing Broker, “The landowners will install fences, lay plastic pipe to deliver water to livestock, and develop other infrastructure to prepare for rotational grazing of livestock on acres previously enrolled in the federal Conservation Reserve Program.”

The effort is part of the regional Grazing Broker project that enhances pastures and other grasslands by bringing together landowners and livestock producers in lease relationships.

The grazing demonstration sites, located in Cross Plains, Spring Green, and Avoca, Wisconsin, will be rented at reduced rates to beginning livestock producers. A total of 118 acres will be available to rent. Sites will also host educational events. Rental fees generated by the project will be invested in grazing education and implementation of grazing best management practices in Southwest Wisconsin.



**Prescribed Grazing Demonstration Sites**

Bauer said, “The sites’ prior enrollment in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and lack of existing grazing systems motivated our selection. The sites include upland areas that are sensitive to wind and water erosion, as well as streamside areas that are sensitive to compaction and water erosion. Our goal is to engage farmers in practices, such as grazing, that benefit fish and wildlife and lead to long-term reductions in nutrient loss from agricultural lands.”

Southwest Badger Resource Conservation & Development Council, Inc. is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization working in the Southwest Wisconsin region. The organization’s mission is to implement natural resource conservation and rural economic development in the area through education and best practices relating to agriculture, grassland, forests, and surface waters.

The Grazing Broker connects landowners with livestock producers to keep grasslands intact. The project is funded by National Fish & Wildlife Foundation. Learn more at [www.swbadger.org](http://www.swbadger.org).

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Armed to farm: use your skills to heal the land, Fall 2016  
By Robert Bauer, Southwest Badger RC&D Council, Inc.

Picture a farm. What are you doing there? How does it smell? Who's there with you? If you see yourself with animals, loving the smells of grass and soil, surrounded by friends and family, you'll like this story.

It's a cliché that it's difficult to access farmland in the US (assuming that you aren't lucky enough to inherit land). In my experience, there's plenty of land, but not enough people ready or willing to farm on a scale to sustain a modern lifestyle. Plus, many idealistic people hope to buy land immediately, without putting in the time to develop experience and farming skills through internships, jobs, and renting land. After a down payment and mortgage there is often little cash left over to buy animals, equipment, or pay the bills, and these farms struggle to grow and survive. However, anyone can get into farming without breaking the bank: there are many people who want to help new farmers to gain experience and make sound financial decisions.



**Ron and Tara Schoepp share with a group of beginning livestock farmers how to use a wooden template to mark and cut fiberglass fence posts. Ron and Tara grow crops, feed dairy heifers, and raise grass-fed beef in Sauk and Columbia Counties near Lodi, WI. They are willing to share what they know with beginning farmers.**

For example, a farmer asked me recently to find someone to operate the farm next year. Food-grade grains, soybeans, and alfalfa hay are the main crops, with pasture available for grazing. It's a turnkey setup: more than 200 acres tillable, multiple tractors, and a farm house. The owner wants to take a backseat after years of building up the soil, accumulating equipment, and perfecting the genetics of his seeds. But the kids don't want to farm. And there's a scarcity of farmkids (the group of people lucky enough to expect to inherit a farm) looking for a farm to operate.

I reached out to my networks for the retiring farmer and soon found a farmer of food-grade organic grain who might be interested to have a satellite farm (the two farms are about 30 miles apart). As we talked, I learned that the organic farmer is mentoring a new farmer who will operate and eventually gain ownership in the business. Through the mentorship, the new farmer persuaded the experienced farmer to transition to organic certification, which took lots of research, work, and patience, but has paid off.

Organic grains, as it turns out, are a big opportunity: the US imported over \$1.2 billion in organic food from abroad last year, according to the USDA. The mentor farmer figured out how to add value to his grains by milling them locally in Sauk County and selling the flour to bakers in Madison. Adding organic certification to the farm made it interconnected in other ways: weedy organic grain fields can be cut to be fed as borage to the beginning farmer's livestock.

If you're a military veteran reading this newsletter you might be asking how all these details relate to you. Here's the bottom line: if you have heavy equipment experience this farmer wants to hire you to operate the farm and help transition it to organic certification. No farming experience is required because you will get that on the job, along with coaching from the farmer. You just need a good attitude and ability to communicate. And like the new farmer whom I mentioned, it could open up opportunities for you to graze livestock or own a farm. Surrounded by a community of folks who want you to succeed, you will be able to turn this farm vision into reality.

As a military veteran, active duty servicemember, or military retiree, your skills are in demand in agriculture. Contact me at 608-732-1202 to learn about this and other opportunities for veterans in agriculture in Southwest Wisconsin.