



Ottauquechee Natural Resources Conservation District
28 Farmvu Drive • White River Jct., VT • 05001

Comstock Farm, Chester VT
Farmer Discussion Group Meeting, June 11, 2002

On a rare hot muggy June morning Sam and Laurie Comstock on their newly acquired farm in Chester generously hosted a farmer discussion group meeting. Those in attendance included dairy, sheep, beef, goat and beefalo farmers as well as representatives from NRCS, UVM extension, Vermont department of agriculture, Country Folks and Ottauquechee Conservation District who were all there to learn and share their experiences. The meeting started in the kitchen of their large historic farmhouse. Sam and Laurie described a little about themselves and what brought them to their new farm and some of the challenges they are facing.

Sam and Laurie are originally from Maine and moved to Colorado where they have been for the last 12 years to pursue educational opportunities. Sam has recently been hired by UVM Extension as a beef specialist and is based in Brattleboro. In Colorado they had opportunities to raise sheep, milk goats and other animals. They brought some of their animals including prized milk goats with them to Vermont. Already they have noticed a large difference in the price and availability of feed and access to ready markets for their animals. In Colorado grain was cheap and readily available and there were several sale houses within easy distance of their farm. In Vermont they are still in process assessing their resources and figuring out what animals they want to have and how to market them. They are considering beef, laying chickens, milk goats, sheep and horses.

The farm is about 90 acres with about 2/3 forested and the remainder pasture. There are a variety of soil types with varying capacities however the land sports ledge outcrops and shallow soils providing some limitations. Sam and Laurie are interested in developing an intensive grazing program for whatever combination of animals they end up having. The farm has several outbuildings and barns, which would need significant improvements or replacement to make farm more functional.



Moving outside Marie Caduto the Agricultural Resource Specialist described the Farm*A*Syst program that can provide free water testing and assessment to farms to help ensure good water quality free of bacteria, nitrates and pesticides. She is working with Comstock's to test their water and address issues such as proper manure storage site.

Kevin Kaija demonstrated quick coupling PVC water hydrants that can either be buried or laid on the ground to bring water to paddocks that are successfully being used by a neighboring farmer. The quick coupling assembly less pipe would cost about 15 dollars. Kevin also showed a wheel meter that can be used to determine distances in the field and a Intensive Grazing Pasture Management Worksheet.



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Dana Young described the Partners for Wildlife Program that can cost share with farmers to install fence to exclude animals from streams in exchange for farmers maintaining a wildlife buffer along stream.

Chuck Armstrong mentioned there are inexpensive accurate handheld GPS units that can be used in the field to collect location data in the field to assist in farm management. He also showed the start of a nutrient management plan for the farm which includes animal numbers, manure production, GIS maps with environmental setbacks delineated, soil types, soil tests and recommendations as well places to record farm nutrient applications and harvests.

Willie Gibson demonstrated a pasture stick that can be used to help farms estimate amount of forage available in pasture and help size paddocks. Also to make intensive pasture management work needed to have infrastructure of fencing and water in place to be successful. Mike Ghia described how he likes to set up grazing with “five sides” Four sides establish a rectangle in an area where the animals will be grazing over a period of time while the



fifth side makes a partition within that area for a shorter period of time. When that section is done grazing the fourth side can leapfrog the fifth side to create a new area for grazing. Willie emphasized the need to step back especially on a new operation with a lot of needs and try to visualize what the ideal layout and solutions would be and then determine what is doable in short run that will help reach those goals.

The meeting concluded with an enjoyable potluck lunch and continued conversation. Sherrie Russell attended the event on behalf of Country Folks and the paper was congratulated on its excellent coverage of farming events and its value to the farming community. Look for an announcement of our next Farmer Discussion Group meeting on the Ottauquechee Website: <http://vacd.org/onrcd> .



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