“Adding Value to Your Small Ruminant Enterprise” Event a Success

On March 10th, 2018, a full house at the Cokato City Hall learned about the potential of getting paid to manage public and private lands with livestock. Kelly Anderson, MDA Livestock Specialist, along with the Sustainable Farming Associations’ Ecological Service Livestock Network (ESLN), organized the event for goat and sheep farmers looking to tap into the emerging market for managed browsing/grazing for cost-effective, ecological land management. Small ruminants are increasingly being used with great success to control invasive species and to restore degraded woodland, savannah and prairie landscapes.

—Karl Hakanson, UM Extension-Hennepin County, ESLN Coordinator.

Cherrie Nolden, Ph.D. Candidate, Animal Sciences, UW-Madison, presented Goat Browsing: Science and Practical Implementation. She discussed the results of her extensive brush management research, including ecological changes, animal health, forage preferences, and breed differences, including the practical considerations for brush management implementation with sheep, which can be applied for invasive plant management just as easily as goats (full presentation here: www.sfa-mn.org/ecological-service-livestock-network).


JB Bright shared the history and objectives of grazing cattle, sheep, and goats on the Morris Wetland Management District to manage prairies and grasslands. He gave specific examples of goat and sheep grazing that was targeted at invasive vegetation, and how they typically graze 40 plus acre areas for months at a time, as opposed to small paddocks grazed intensely for short duration, as is often done for municipalities.

Three livestock for-hire business owners shared their experiences: how they got started, determining costs, equipment needs, and other aspects of livestock-based land management enterprises. Jake Langeslag (Goat Dispatch, Faribault, MN / goatdispatch.com), talked about the evolution of his business, starting as a rural landowner with a keen interest in ecology, to a business with 250 goats and many contracts throughout the region, including the City of St. Paul. He starting small, learning on his own land and working with his neighbors. He provided a wealth of ideas and options based on his years’ of experience for others interested in getting stated with small ruminants for land management.

Kyle Johnson (Diversity Landworks, LaCrescent, MN / www.diversitylandworks.com), touched on disease control, fencing, the practical aspects of working with the animals, and, landowners. He highlighted some of the tools and equipment of the trade and keeping costs down. Diversity Landworks had the first ever contract with the Mpls. Park and Recreation Board in 2017. Like Jake, Kyle stressed the importance of understanding ecological principles and the need for long-term, adaptive approaches to land restoration.

Allysse Soenssen (The Munch Bunch, St. Croix Falls, WI / www.munchbunchgoats.com), spoke about some of the challenges of the job, some creative solutions to moving and housing goats, and ways to go about pricing. She encouraged the audience to think about the various considerations in pricing jobs, such as terrain, ease of access, and density of brush. The success of land managers and service livestock enterprises, and, the results of formal research, is very encouraging. Bringing livestock back on the land --browsers and grazers-- can be profitable and is key in the restoration of degraded landscapes, landscapes that have evolved with and therefore require herbivores to be healthy.

An event of the Ecological Service Livestock Network

www.sfa-mn.org/ecological-service-livestock-network ...to develop business models and facilitate research to advance the art and science of profitable livestock-based, land management businesses for managing lands in ways that restore ecological functionality and reduce our dependence on fossil fuel-based solutions.