

UW-Madison: Grassland 2.0 seeks to transform upper midwest agriculture through perennial grasslands

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MADISON – Bert Paris loves dairy farming. After more than 30 years, he’s beginning to transition the farm he operates near Belleville, Wisconsin, to his daughter, Meagan Farrell, who is excited about moving her family home to run it.

Despite years of terrible headlines about the dairy industry, farmers like Paris and Farrell are bullish on dairy because, despite chronically low and erratic milk prices, they’ve controlled their production costs with managed grazing. “Grazing, financially speaking, was the best thing I’ve ever done for my business,” Paris says.

Paris is a participant in Grassland 2.0, a newly formed collaborative group based at the University of Wisconsin-Madison that is working to create more opportunities for grazing and other types of perennial grassland farming. Paris joins a network of UW-Madison researchers, state and local agency staff, milk and meat processors, citizen groups, and other farmers coming together to seek transformative solutions to the growing number of threats facing Midwest food and farming systems.

The project is bringing together stakeholders to envision and plan a future of profitable, productive farmland that also provides many of the benefits of the region’s original prairie, such as clean water, healthy soil, biodiversity and resilience to extreme weather.

Grassland-based farming practices represent a bright spot in an industry that is feeling the combined effects of low commodity prices, extreme weather events, rising production costs, and limited processing and marketing options. Consumer data suggest that while red meat and milk consumption are declining overall, both

grass-fed dairy and meat sales are surging. A multi-decade analysis by the UW-Madison Center for Dairy Profitability found that although grazing-based dairies often produce less milk per cow, the money they save by grazing ultimately increases their profitability.

STORY CONTINUES AT <https://news.wisc.edu/grassland-2-0-seeks-to-transform--upper-midwest-agriculture-through-perennial-grasslands/>