



Indiana Forage Council Newsletter

Grazing Systems Supply

By Kayla Groen

“Practice what you preach” is a way of life and business for the Nuhring family.

Dave, Shirley, and son Clay own and operate Grazing Systems Supply, which supplies forage seed, fencing products, livestock equipment, and watering supplies to farmers that rotationally graze pastures and produce hay. What makes their business really special is that many of the products they sell have been tested on their own farm.

“The products that we sell — we use them,” Shirley said. “And if they fail in our system, we don’t sell them because we’re not going to sell a product that we know is eventually going to fail for somebody.”

But the Nuhrings’ tests aren’t just about ensuring quality products — they are a way to test new ideas, which is the foundation of their business.

In the 1980s, Dave read an article about rotational grazing in New Zealand.

“The whole article was about how they were subdividing their pastures and treating them more like we do a hay field, where you harvest the forage, let it regrow and harvest it again, doing this several times during the growing season,” Dave said. “I thought, ‘Yeah, why would you not do that with pasture? This makes a whole lot of sense.’”

The practice intrigued him, and he was ready to try the new concept on his own farm. If it was more productive than continuous grazing, he planned to help others get started in rotational grazing.



Clay Nuhring with an array of products sold at Grazing Systems Supply. Courtesy of Kayla Groen.

However, the Nuhrings realized that the products and information they needed to successfully implement a rotational grazing system on their farm were not easily accessible in the 1980s. So, they decided to start Grazing Systems Supply to fill their needs and those of other farmers.

Now the business has two locations and numerous customers, and it is transitioning into a second-generation operation as Clay assumes full management responsibilities. Clay plans to build on his

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father's entrepreneurial spirit.

"I would like to see the business grow with more customers," Clay said. "The challenge I foresee in the future is the average age of the American farmer or rancher. More and more people are acquiring 'the farm' from their parents. I encourage young men and women to utilize the property to the best of its ability."

Although Dave and Shirley are phasing out of the business, they are still looking to the future. Until now, they have limitedly used the Internet and social media in the advertisement of their products, but now they see that utilizing these tools effectively is essential.

"The future to me is to develop a website that brings people to the brick-and-mortar for the information to sell them a product, because it's the only way we can get paid for it," Dave said. "We've got to find a way to market our information, and the only way we can do that is through a product. But, you've got to get people into the store to do that. It's a dilemma."

Because of that dilemma, the Nuhrings feel a lot of pressure competing with online markets.

"We're as much in the information business as we are in the product business. If I'm going to market my information across the Internet, people get my information for free, and then they go shop the lowest dollar on the Internet. I can't compete with Amazon shipping," Dave said.

That means the family and their business must provide

And hopefully, that will translate into a successful business model.

"If a customer gets good information on how to use a product, that can be as valuable as the product," Dave said.

And this philosophy pays off for the Nuhrings. Their greatest joy comes from customer satisfaction and trust.



Clay Nuhring. Photo courtesy of Kayla Groen

"I wish I kept count of how many times someone has walked in and said, 'I was told to come see you, because you know what you're talking about,' or 'I hear you have the best seed and/or fence around.' I can sell the products with confidence!" Clay said.

No matter what the future and its challenges may bring, the family takes pride that they

something to farmers that the Internet always can't. For the Nuhrings, that is honest information.

"Many people want to raise their own food source," Clay said. "I feel as though I cannot only help them with the products we sell, but also with the knowledge I have acquired over the years of raising our own food."

"practice what they preach" and serve farmers to the best of their abilities.

"That's just the way we like to manage our business," said Dave, "and I think over time the word of mouth gets out that this is the way we do business. I think it helps everyone."

Upcoming Events

January 14-17, 2018: American Forage and Grassland Council Annual Conference — Louisville, KY

February 2-3, 2018: Northern Indiana Grazing Conference — Michiana Events Center in Shipshewana, IN

February 19, 2018: Indiana Forage Council Annual Meeting — Abe Martin Lodge in Brown County State Park

February 26-27, 2018: Heart of America Grazing Conference in conjunction with Southwest Missouri Spring Forage Conference — University Plaza Hotel in Springfield, MO

March 7, 2018: Southern Indiana Grazing Conference — Odon, IN

2019 Heart of America Grazing Conference hosted in Indiana by IFC



IFC Annual Meeting and Seminar

As part of its annual meeting and seminar on February 19, the Indiana Forage Council (IFC) has invited two forage-livestock producers to discuss their successful use of different forages in their beef cattle operations.

Josh Cox, a farmer in Tippecanoe County, will discuss how his parents and he have implemented grazing cover crops as a way to improve soil health for their row crops

and as a way to rest their permanent pastures. Josh customizes his cover crop mix to provide quality forage for the beef cattle and to reduce compaction and add organic matter to his soils.

Dave Fischer, the Indiana Forage Council's Outstanding Producer award winner in 2017, lives in Dubois County. He will share how he utilizes annual ryegrass and corn grown for silage to produce beef for direct marketing to retail customers. Fischer Farm's beef is marketed to many distinctive restaurants.

Members and guests are invited to attend the presentations during the IFC's annual meeting. The annual meeting will be held February 19 at the Abe Martin Lodge which is located within Brown County State Park, Nashville, IN. The annual meeting for members and anyone interested starts at 4:30 p.m. and is followed by dinner at 6 p.m. The seminar, featuring Cox and Fischer, begins at 7 p.m.

Participation in the annual meeting is not required for participation in the dinner and seminar. The cost of the dinner is \$20. Attendees are requested to RSVP by February 12 to Jason Tower, towerj@purdue.edu or 812-678-4427.

President's Letter

Welcome to the first edition of the Indiana Forage Council newsletter for 2018. I hope that you have enjoyed our previous editions and we have several great producer spotlights lined up for future publications in 2018. The IFC had a great year with getting the newsletter going again, helping with Grazing 102 and providing the leadership for the great forage tour that was held in south central Indiana this past summer. Thanks to all who participated this past year and stay tuned for IFC sponsored events coming in 2018.

This past year was a year of challenges for many of our forage producers. It may have been due too much rain, too little rain or both depending on your location. The great thing about forage agriculture is the forgiveness those species offer us with a bit of management on our part. Good rest, recovery and soil fertility allow for pastures and hay fields to rebound and offer grazing and stored feed opportunities even after tough environmental conditions. I know for me, it was another learning experience that will allow for better management the next time these events occur. A few notes and records will help me to remember how we got through the tough times.

Looking forward to 2018, IFC has put together a great program for the annual meeting to be held February 19 at the Abe Martin Lodge in Brown County State Park. Two of Indiana's great forage producers will be discussing management items they use in their operations that give them an advantage over less progressive producers. Hope to see you there.

Best wishes for 2018 and may the grass always be greener on your side of the fence.

Jason Tower

IFC President

Seasonal Tips

January

Graze corn residue (if soil conditions permit) and supplement with good quality forage.

Provide wind breaks or shelters and extra energy feed in very cold weather.

Calculate the costs and possible returns for this year's forage enterprise.

Frost-seed legumes in pastures that contain less than 30% legumes.

Keep snowmobiles, ATVs, and other vehicles out of alfalfa.

February

Frost-seed legumes in pastures that contain less than 30% legumes (if not done in Jan).

Remove livestock from corn residue fields (if not done earlier) to avoid soil compaction.

Frost-seed legumes into winter small grain fields.

Apply appropriate herbicides in alfalfa (if necessary) to control winter-annual grass and broadleaf weeds.