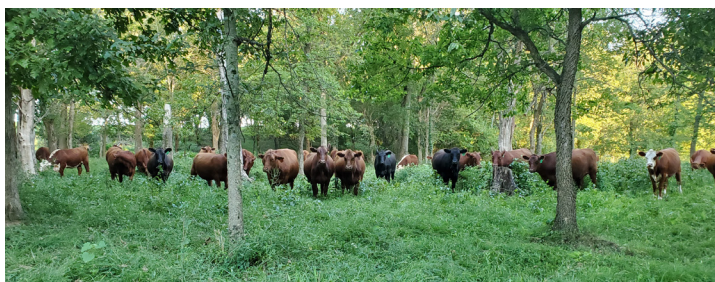




“There are plenty of things that we can do, we just really need the narrative to be changed so that more people can understand it better. So they’re not so scared to say, ‘let’s imagine something different.’”

Bonnie Haugen
Dairy Grazier, Springside Farm, MN



Just Transitions to Managed Livestock Grazing

Needs and Opportunities for Change in the Midwestern United States



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Executive Summary

Midwest farmers and members of the managed grazing community are working toward a future in which the food system supports community and environmental well-being. This report highlights key takeaways from conversations with nearly 130 people within this community about their visions for the future and how to make that future a reality.

In the future they imagined, agriculture builds rich soils and farms are vibrant with life. It's a future in which anyone, no matter their background, can become a farmer, and in which all who grow, harvest, and process food live comfortably. It's one of abundance, in which no one goes hungry and healthy food is available to all. In this future, rural communities are lively, collaborative, and welcoming places known to city-dwellers nearby – places where kids want to stay and many are proud to call home.

Today, the food system in the Midwest falls far short of this vision. Increasingly, rural communities contend with biodiversity loss, soil erosion, and contaminated well water, a consequence of farming practices that favor intensive production of a few commodity crops. Farm owners and workers struggle to make a living, access healthcare, and retire, and the next generation is unable to afford land to farm. Urban flight and farm consolidation have stressed the fabric of rural communities. Exploitation of workers throughout the supply chain is the norm, and healthy food remains inaccessible to many in rural and urban communities alike.

In this report, we share community perspectives on how to create a 'just transition' in agriculture through the lens of expanding managed livestock grazing in the Midwest region.

A just transition would enable those who work in agriculture and food systems to regain control over agricultural land, markets, and institutions; address inequities in the distribution of power and resources; and support healthy environments, communities, and livelihoods.

The purpose of this report is to share ideas on how to support managed livestock grazing in a way that addresses inequities and creates a food system that supports everyone.

Who this report is for

This report is intended for a wide audience of change-makers including policy makers and advocates, farmers and farmer organizers, NGOs, agricultural educators, Extension professionals, technical support providers (TSPs), and agriculture financiers. A range of recommendations with implications for grassroots organizing, governmental and non-governmental policies and programs, and broader governance solutions are integrated throughout. Diverse audiences can adapt the content to their line of work, for example by incorporating them into strategic goals, programming, organizing, or advocacy efforts. We have also developed briefs with tailored recommendations for universities (researchers and Extension), National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), and policy advocates. The full report and briefs can be found at grasslandag.org/justtransitions.

Takeaways

The report is divided into eight sections: education, alternative markets, processing, essential workers, consolidation, capital, land access, and social norms. These sections help organize actions around specific areas of work. However, we also recognize that many actions interact with others and have highlighted some places where they connect with other sections of the text. The following provides an abbreviated summary of takeaways. Recommendations are also summarized at the start of each section.



EDUCATION

- Invest in farmer-to-farmer networks, mentoring programs, and sustainable agriculture
- Increase support for animals other than cattle, business planning, and marketing
- Build trust between TSPs and BIPOC communities



PROCESSING

- Support small and cooperative processors and mobile and on-farm processing
- Strengthen antitrust laws to decrease consolidation
- Address labor exploitation and expand education on butchering and processing



CONSOLIDATION

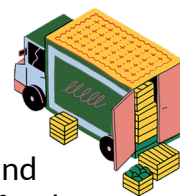
- Address industry consolidation
- Equitably distribute profits made in the food system
- Stabilize dairy prices by addressing consolidation and overproduction

LAND ACCESS



- Reduce farm consolidation, financial speculation, and urban sprawl
- Return land to BIPOC farmers
- Decouple retirement from land sales, support succession planning, and connect beginning and BIPOC farmers to land
- Shift dominant ways of thinking about land

ALTERNATIVE MARKETS



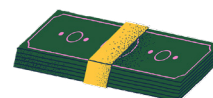
- Improve consumer demand and accessibility for grass-based foods
- Improve certifications and labels and support markets for animals other than cattle
- Expand institutional procurement, co-ops, and pay for performance programs

ESSENTIAL WORKERS



- Change immigration laws, expand education on workers' rights and create avenues for workers to build wealth
- Provide living wages, healthcare, and housing for farm owners and workers
- Support co-ops across the supply chain

CAPITAL



- Restructure agricultural subsidies
- Expand sustainable agriculture knowledge and cultural and language competency among lenders/grant makers
- Change lending and grant-making norms, reform FSA and USDA programs, and amend EQIP
- Develop programs to support small farms and cover basic operating expenses

SOCIAL NORMS



- Measure "farm success" in ways that center farmers and communities, and profitability over productivity
- Understand food as medicine and expand notions of what agriculture looks like
- Build grazing communities and support the next generation