



# MARATHON AND LINCOLN COUNTY MANAGEMENT INTENSIVE GRAZING PROJECT REPORT 1998-2008



*Plan prepared by Marathon County Land  
Conservation and Zoning Committee*

MARATHON AND LINCOLN COUNTY  
MANAGEMENT INTENSIVE GRAZING (MIG) PROJECT  
1998-2008

**Background.** In 1994, a dozen grass-based farmers and agricultural professionals formed an association called the Central Wisconsin River Graziers Network with the following mission statement:

*To promote the feasibility of grazing-based farming as a profitable way of farming that enhances lifestyles and protects and improves the environment.*

To meet the increased technical and educational needs of the landowners and Graziers Network, the Marathon and Lincoln County Land Conservation Committees developed a joint project to advance Managed Intensive Grazing (MIG) as a resource practice. In 1998, the Lincoln and Marathon County Managed Intensive Grazing Project was established as a three (3) year project. The four objectives of the project were:

- Provide one-on-one farm planning assistance to farmers wanting to implement MIG. This would include fencing design and layout, travel lanes, and watering systems.
- Educate farmers and agricultural professionals about the benefits of MIG, through pasture walks, winter conferences, and media.
- Educate local agricultural lenders, educators, and leaders about the benefits of MIG.
- Develop a curriculum for technical and high school agricultural classes that showcases MIG.

The MIG project continues to provide livestock producers with a low-cost and profitable entry opportunity for beginning farmers, as well as a profitable production model for existing producers. By reducing labor and energy costs, farmers keep operational costs lower (Taylor, 2006). To date, the MIG project has developed 266 management plans for 20,617 acres of pasture. These plans provide design assistance to landowners for practices such as cattle travel lanes, watering systems, fencing and pasture management. A key part of this project is to provide educational and technical support on the farm to individual farmers during their transition to grazing. Each year project staff visit nearly 60 farmers to assure that their transitions are successful.

**Economic Impact:** For the counties, MIG has been a low-cost management practice that is unmatched in soil and water conservation benefits. In Wisconsin, dairy farmers using MIG earn similar household incomes with half the number of cows, have less debt, and are more satisfied with their overall quality of life than other types of farmers (Lloyd, 2007).

Table 1. Annual Economic Contribution of MIG Project Farms.

County	Dairy Cows	Beef	Annual Receipts/yr (\$ Million)
Marathon	10,235		31.14
		3,884	2.4
Lincoln	543		1.65
		1,797	1.1

- Note: 1. \$3,042 gross farm income/cow using 195 cwt/cow at \$15.60 CWT  
 2. \$612 gross farm income for a 1,000 lb animal  
 3. Gross farm prices are a five (5) year average from WI Agricultural Statistics

**Partnerships/Fiscal Contributions:** The MIG project has represented a collaboration of several private and public partnerships that have contributed time and funding to sustain the project. Table 2 identifies contributing agencies and associations to the project. Marathon and Lincoln Counties' Land Conservation departments also receive significant support from the University of Wisconsin-Extension, Grassworks, and Central Wisconsin River Graziers Network.

Table 2. Partnership and Contribution (1998-2008).

Agency Or Organization	Assistance	Administrative in-kind costs	Technical Assistance	Landowner Grants
Marathon County Conservation, Planning, and Zoning Department	Project administration and technical assistance.	\$16,500	\$330,000	
Lincoln County Land Conservation Department	Project administration and technical assistance.	\$7,250	\$145,000	
WI Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP)	Education Grant and Land & Water Resource Management Grant.			\$312,829
USDA- Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)	• Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)			\$550,000
	• Conservation Security Program (CSP)			\$771,834
	• Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI)	\$19,089	\$381,784	
DNR-Priority Watershed	Big Eau Pleine and Lower Big Rib River			\$82,672
Upland Chapter of Pheasants Forever	Habitat Grant/Seed Drill		\$8000*	
US Fish and Wildlife	Habitat Grant		\$4,500*	
Wisconsin Waterfowl Association	Habitat Grant		\$1,000*	
Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education (SARE)	Agricultural Sustainability Grant	\$1,250	\$25,000*	
Total		\$44,089	\$895,284	\$1,717,335

\*Funding secured during initial project period (YR 1998-2000).

**Project Outputs:** The MIG project has emphasized educational outreach to landowners and their support systems (schools, lenders, and nutritionists) to promote grazing, to transition into grazing management, and to develop technical plans and practices for successful implementation. Pasture walks, newsletters, conferences and one-on-one assistance remain the vehicles to support landowners.



Table 3. Educational Activities (1998-2008)

Activity	Number	Notes
Newsletters (12/yr)	132	Circulated to 550 landowners/year
Winter Conferences	11	Average Attendance 95 farm producers/year
Pasture Walks (15/yr)	165	Average attendance 25 producers/walk
“Official” Tours	12	Tours to State Senators and Governors, Agency Secretaries, US.
High School and Vo-tech Curriculum	Completed	Distributed statewide in YR 2000.
Farm Technology Days YR 1996	Completed	Featured Guralski Farm during 3 day event
“Incubator” Farm Opportunity Development	Completed	Assessment and business tools featured on “You can farm” website. Used in Beginning Grazing Farming Program
Farm Profitability Analysis	36	UW-EX assistance with farm profitability analysis and economic benchmarks.
UW School for Beginning Dairy farmers and Distance Education Trips to grazing farms (3/yr)	30	Education sponsored by UW-EX and CPZ staff to prepare and assist new graziers. Average participation of 60 landowners per year.

**Environmental Benefits:** Managed Intensive Grazing is recognized as a best management practice. Some of the benefits include reduced chemical use by 76% per cow versus confinement operations, reduced fuel costs by 31% (Kriegel, 2006), increased nesting habitat by 1400% per acre versus row crop farming (Undersander, 2000), increased soil organic matter, and carbon sequestration (Donovan, 2008).

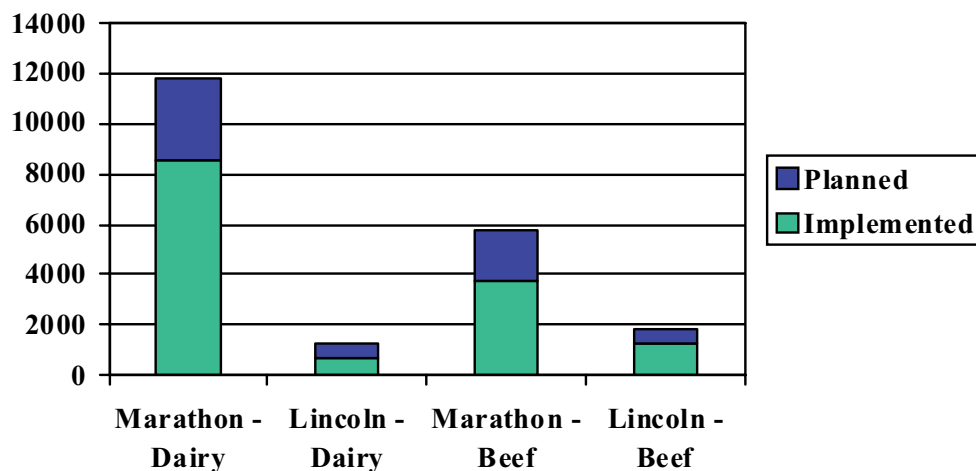


Table 4. Environmental Impact of Implementing MIG (1998-2008).

Management Practice	Number	Average Reduction	Nutrient Loading Reduction/yr
Barnyard Runoff Control Systems	266	40 lbs of Phosphorus/Barnyard	10,640 lbs Phosphorus
Permanent Vegetative cover	14,273 acres	Sediment: 2.0 tons/acre/year	28,546 tons
		Phosphorus: 8 lbs/ton/year	57,128 lbs

- Notes: 1. Reduced barnyard nutrient loading from runoff by 70%.  
 2. Twenty-five percent of soil movement is delivered to surface water.  
 3. Phosphorus loading from sediment is eight pounds per ton of delivered sediment.

Graph 1. Planned and Implemented Grazing Acres by Livestock Type (1998-2008)



County	Dairy Planned (acres)	Dairy Implemented (acres)	Beef Planned (acres)	Beef Implemented (acres)
Marathon	11,806	8,579	5,731	3,755
Lincoln	1,254	707	1,826	1,232

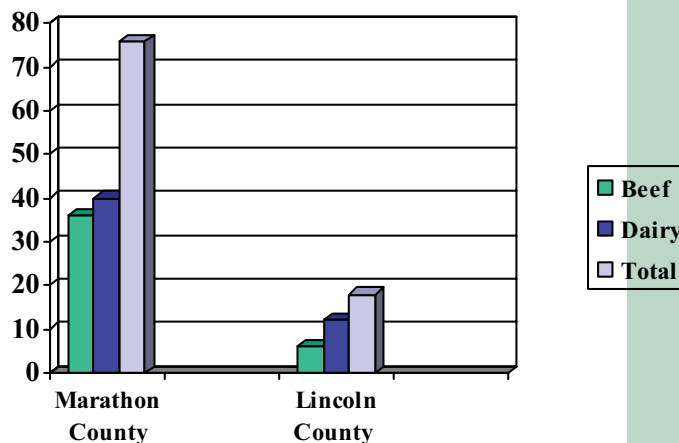
Graph 2: Number of New Farm Start-ups (1998-2008).

Marathon County:

- Dairy 40
- Beef 36

Lincoln County:

- Dairy 6
- Beef 12



Marathon County and Lincoln County  
Management Intensive Grazing Project

**Project Description:** The Land Conservation Committees from Marathon and Lincoln Counties have partnered with the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) and the United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS) to provide technical assistance and education to livestock producers to promote Managed Intensive Grazing (MIG) and economic activity.

**Program customer:** Marathon County and Lincoln County livestock producers, lenders, educators, and agri-business.

INPUTS		2008 ACTIVITIES		PURPOSE (Outcomes)	
Resources		“Work”	Output	Immediate (0-10 yrs)	Long Term (15-20 yrs)
<b>Funding:</b> Marathon Co. - \$330,000 Lincoln Co - \$145,000 GLCI - \$381,784 DATCP – 312,829 EQIP - \$550,000 CSP - \$771,834 WI Waterfowl - \$1,000 US Fish & Wildlife - \$4,500 SARE- \$25,000 Pheasants Forever - \$8,000 DNR - \$82,672		Technical Assistance:  Information & Education:	Management Plans Follow-up Practice Design Practice Installation  Incubator Model School Curriculum  Newsletters Conferences Pasture Walks Progress Reports Professional Workshop	Landowners will: 1. Understand environmental benefits of MIG 2. Understand the economic benefits of MIG.  Professionals will: 1. Understand the financial considerations of MIG. 2. Understand educational curriculum for MIG.  Measurement Report:	Marathon County Agricultural and Woodlot producers are economically viable.  The soil resource is maintained as a productive asset by conserving through topsoil and organic matter conservation.  To improve, maintain and protect the surface and ground water, floodplain, and shoreland assets for public health and safety, recreational opportunities and economic viability.  Land use is well planned and regulated to minimize conflicts, maximize infrastructure investments, and protect the rural character.
<b>Partnerships:</b> NRCS UW-EX Grassworks Central WI Graz Network DATCP					

## References

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## Acknowledgements:

Major contributors to this projects long-term success include the Marathon and Lincoln County Land Conservation Departments and Committees, UW-Extension, the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, and to the many farmers who have opened up their farms and shared their knowledge and experience in managed grazing.



**“Management Intensive Grazing is a low cost practice that is unmatched in soil and water conservation benefits”**

