

Workshop Title: Pasture Renovation

Speaker(s) & their titles: Aaron Hiltz, Canaan Pastured Land Products

Executive Summary :

Aaron Hiltz (CanaanLand Pastured Products, Lake George, Kings Co.) is a young Nova Scotia farmer. He was inspired by a talk given by Joel Salatin to being a pasture-based, multi-species operation. Grazing cows in rotation with laying hens and broilers provides his family and his consumers with the benefits of pasture in their eggs and meat. Aaron will share his experiences about rejuvenating pasture, using multi-species grazing. His experience with pasture renovation began with a run-down horse pasture belonging to his parents, now a productive pasture with a thick sward of different grass and legume species; and has now begun the process on his own sixty-five acre farm in Lake George.

Detailed Notes:

- Aaron's outlook : everything is related, everything is one, and things cannot be compartmentalized easily.
- Aaron keeps dairy cows, raising the young calves to cut the disease cycle at his parents' dairy farm.
- « Stay small and stay smart. »
- Aaron also keeps a large flock of laying hens, who follow behind the cows. The cows are living with « tall-grass grazing », where they have to graze and trample certain amounts of pasture. The chickens aid in trampling forage. Aaron encourages this by pulling their chicken pen into different spots in the pasture. The feeders are also strategically placed to aid in spreading the trampling effect.
- Aaron raises Red and Black Sexlets.
- Uses electric fencing around his laying building. He uses a wire floor to release manure onto the pasture below the laying building. It's good to move this almost every day within the electric-fenced area.

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- The main use of the chickens is bringing fertility to pasture. The eggs produced by the hens are a paying by-product of fertilizing Aaron's farm.
- Pastured broilers (White Leghorns) should be kept away from treelines, as they like to roost in high places.
- Black Astrolorps were pastured in Joel Salatin-designed broiler pens. Aaron recommends them for pasture rejuvenation.
- Day range is recommended for layers, who are more agile and more in tune with predators.
- Turkeys eat more forage than broilers or layers.
- Trampling grass
 - o Chickens scratch up lignified grass and trample it into the soil to allow access to worms and insects and microbes.
- Chickens respond well to moving on pasture. Aaron moves the building and hens in about an hour, and all are enthusiastic to tackle new ground.
- Chickens are great for separating cow manure and pulling it apart.
- Do not move hens before noon, as they will lay eggs and then spread manure onto the eggs from their foraging in cow patties.
- All birds follow herbivores – Aaron's example is seeing a cow patty that starlings had pulled apart.
- Poor quality pasture can be improved easily with chicken manure : improves density of growth.
- Can see improvement of pasture by noting earthworm castings, dense growth, and green shoots.
- Moss indicates a low soil pH.
- Earthworm castings are a neutral soil pH.
- Aaron recommends Grant Judy's youtube videos to show how to pasture renovate with chickens.
- Earthworm castings can be used as a gauge for how healthy your pasture is.

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- Aaron doesn't use plantings in his soil renovation. Once he planted red clover, once he spread lime. White clover took over, tall and thick.
- One problem species is marsh-sedge, from too-wet clay soil and from overgrazing. There is not much marsh sedge in grassland, because mowers will keep it in check. There is no solution to get rid of it other than using a plow – even pigs will not root it.
- Aaron tried cattle, then chickens, starting in June. Waited for two months and brought the cows back, then the chickens back. Around September, he turns in the pigs, who want to flip the grass. This acts as a plow. Keep the pigs in the area until they destroy 75% of the soil. Let this overwinter, bare, to kill grass and plant life. In spring, broadcast in oats, peas, grasses, and let the chickens back in to go after all the grain, and, at the same time, incorporate all of the grass and cover crop seeds. This is untested as of yet, but Aaron believes it will work well.
- Aaron pastured pigs with goats, and they seem to get along well.
- Grass-fed beef
 - o Pasture alone, good feedback from customers.
- Haymaking
 - o Cutting hay early allows fall grazing.
 - o Pre-grazing is good for hay as well.
- Aaron recommends trying different things and experimenting with processes.

Audience comments :

- Aaron likes vetch and canary grass to bring nutrients to soil. Mostly, he uses native species and does not plow or plant to bring the soil back.
- Try wintering sheep on forested land to create pasture on the forest floor. Goat/pig combinations in the summer are good for this as well.