

NORTHEAST PASTURE CONSORTIUM

Raising cattle, sheep, goats, and other animals on pasture is common in the northeastern U.S. due to the landscape and climate. These farms produce desirable products such as organic milk and grass-fed meat. Pasture-based farms are considered more sustainable than other types of agriculture (pastures filter runoff, sequester carbon, and preserve open space) and they tend to have fewer barriers to entry, lower input costs, and more reliable income. To make sound decisions, farmers, land managers, and policymakers need information about forage varieties, grazing practices, and animal husbandry.

Since 1996, the Northeast Pasture Consortium has brought together researchers, Extension specialists, farmers, agribusiness, government agencies, and others to improve pasture systems in the northeastern U.S.

Led by land-grant universities, the Consortium guides and conducts pasture research, shares information and tools, and promotes pasture-based agriculture and products.

Collaboration has many benefits.

The Consortium has significantly increased interaction among farmers, agribusiness, universities, government agencies, and other stakeholders. Ongoing, regular communication facilitates collaboration, enables long-term research, and makes it possible to quickly address emerging issues. Working together also creates opportunities to submit strong joint letters of support for grant proposals, legislation, and regulations.

Consortium members share expertise, facilities, and resources, overcoming the limited capacity of a single institution. Collaboration distributes the workload and helps avoid duplicative efforts. With members in multiple states, the Consortium can test practices and tools in various conditions. They can also share information and tools widely, maximizing impact.



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IMPACTS

The Consortium shares knowledge and tools that help establish and sustain economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable pasture-based farms across the northeastern U.S.

- The Consortium maintains the Northeast Grazing Guide (grazingguide.net), a “one-stop-shop” for pasture-related resources, including research findings, up-to-date grazing forecasts, and an in-depth guide to forage species in the Northeast.
- The Northeast Pasture Consortium Conference provides a vital forum for farmers and scientists to exchange ideas, information, and tools. Feedback from farmers guides research, and farmers can share their findings directly with farmers.
- The Consortium has connected with and provided information to the Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship Program, which trains young dairy farmers. The program is especially helpful for those who do not inherit or take over a farm and/or have limited capital.
- The Consortium helps farmers understand regulations for organic and grass-fed products and how to market them at farmers markets, retailers, and restaurants.

Conversations and connections fostered by the Consortium have influenced scientists nationwide to conduct important research. In turn, the Consortium helps promote their findings. This research has helped manage pastures, improve animal husbandry, and promote pasture-raised meat and milk. For example:

- Virginia Tech scientists recommended the best varieties of orchardgrass to plant and when and how low to cut it to prevent premature die off.
- After adopting recommendations, farmers have seen their pastures’ soil health increase.
- Researchers identified pasture systems that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, sequester carbon, reduce runoff, and adapt well to climate change.
- Research-based models have shown that pastures produce less runoff of nitrogen, phosphorus, and sediment than other farm types.
- New tools developed by the USDA-ARS and Penn State help federal agencies, conservation planners, and Extension evaluate riparian buffers within pastures and implement practices that protect water quality.
- Research helps pasture farmers understand how to protect cow health and milk yield.
- Cornell University, University of Maine, University of New Hampshire, and University of Vermont scientists have made discoveries about the health benefits of pasture-produced milk, which could increase demand and prices and help dairies stay in business.

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Learn more: bit.ly/NEERA1603

The Multistate Research Fund Impacts Program communicates the importance and value of Hatch Multistate research projects.

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