AMERICAN FORAGE & GRASSLAND COUNCIL

DECEMBER 2025

FORAGE FEED

2026 Annual Conference

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This issue:

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

BY ALAN FRANZLUEBBERS
AFGC 2025 PRESIDENT

In this last quarter of my role as President of AFGC, I'd like to share a few snippets from a series of articles prepared for the Carolina Cattle Connection on "Carbon and Cattle". You'll be able to find the entire series of 12 articles at: https://cefs.ncsu.edu/resources-portal/pasture-management/

Everything living contains carbon! Carbon is in the organic molecules of grass that feed our cattle. Carbon is in the air as carbon dioxide that is absorbed by plants. Carbon is in the soil as part of soil organic matter that slowly decomposes to release nutrients to nourish grasses and forbs to feed the rumen of beef cattle. The cycling of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere to organic molecules of carbohydrates in plants to the blood, hide, and meat in beef cattle is a part of nature that we, as land managers, get to facilitate and enjoy. Turning this process into one that others can savor as tasty meat and milk products in a picturesque landscape setting should give us peace and joy!

Nature is both simple and complex. The idea of cattle consuming forages that eventually become food for us to consume and carry about our daily lives is elementary and often taken for granted. And yet, the biochemical processes needed to make this happen are miraculous in the form of photosynthesis that converts sunlight and carbon dioxide into simple sugars, which are transformed further into complex carbohydrates, proteins, fatty acids, flavenoids, and hormones that cattle can consume and make their own transformations into body tissue. Harvesting these processes as hay or meat products and distributing them to family, friends, and neighbors, as well as finding ways to prepare and celebrate these riches can be a hoe-down that kindles our spirit.

Nature doesn't just bring us life but also requires the cycle to be completed through death and decay. This component is also normal and seemingly simple. And yet, the components of decay are also enormously complex, partly due to the millions of organisms that participate in this process and the diverse environmental conditions they face with fluctuations in temperature, moisture, and availability of organic and inorganic compounds.

Carbon plays a vital role in ecosystem properties, processes, and functions. Healthy soil with abundant near-surface carbon nurtures pastures while also protecting the environment and stabilizing ecosystems. Carbon gives soil its vitality. Stabilized in soil as organic matter, it helps store abundant plant-available nutrients, it loosens soil to allow rapid water infiltration and holds more water over time, and it provides the resources needed for soil microorganisms to be actively transforming soil into a fertile substrate.

This series on cattle and carbon intended to inform readers about the wealth of carbon, clarify carbon calculations, illustrate carbon stocks, reveal differences in origins of soil carbon, and suggest opportunities to improve management and vitality of soil.
Thank you to the AFGC membership in trusting me in this leadership role in 2025! I hope to be present at the Annual Conference in Asheville NC in January 2026 and look forward to speaking with you. Be well!

Tennessee Forage and Grassland Council

BY JASON HARTSHUH

The Tennessee Forage & Grassland Council (TFGC) was founded in 1984 to help forage producers boost efficiency, profitability, and long-term sustainability. Tennessee ranks 11th in the country for acres used in hay production and grazing, so it's no surprise that forages are the backbone of agriculture in all 95 counties.

As a cow-calf state, Tennessee depends heavily on its 3.5 million acres of pastureland. In 2024, farmers harvested 1.65 million acres of hay (including alfalfa), producing nearly 3.64 million tons worth about $541.9 million. These forages keep the state's livestock industry running strong, with tall fescue and other cool-season grasses leading the way, while warm-season grasses and annual forages add flexibility across Tennessee's diverse soils and weather conditions.

Tennessee is also one of the country's top beef-producing states—12th nationwide and 4th in the Southeast. The state is home to more than 45,000 cattle operations and 32 livestock markets, with an average herd size of about 35 head. As of 2024, Tennessee had 1.57 million head of cattle and calves, including 826,000 beef cows and 24,000 dairy cows. Beef cattle consistently rank among the top agricultural commodities in the state, making up about 16.7% of all agricultural cash receipts.

TFGC helps producers adopt better grazing strategies, improve soil health, and strengthen forage management so their operations can stay productive despite weather swings and changing conditions. The Council offers Grazing Schools, pasture walks, field days, and our Annual Meeting (held on the First Friday of November), which had over 100 people in attendance this year. These events bring together experts in forage agronomy, grazing management, nutrition, and farm economics to share practical, research-based recommendations producers can use immediately.

TFGC also works closely with UT Extension, the UT Beef & Forage Center, NRCS, conservation districts, and industry partners to support efforts such as forage establishment, rotational grazing, tall fescue renovation (including novel endophyte varieties), and warm-season forage adoption. These partnerships help ensure that Tennessee's forage-livestock systems stay productive, competitive, and resilient.

Join Us: Producers interested in joining the Tennessee Forage & Grassland Council can visit:
https://members.afgc.org/secure/membership.cfm

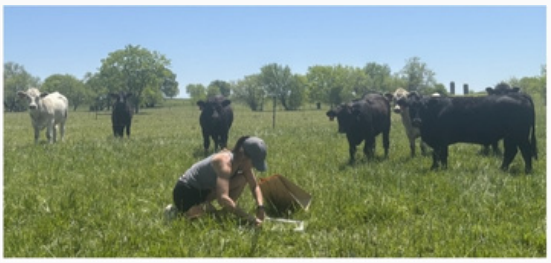
TFGC welcomes producers to upcoming pasture walks, grazing schools, and forage-focused events across the state as we work together to build healthy, resilient, and profitable forage–livestock systems in Tennessee. Look for our Spring Meeting in Jackson, TN on Tuesday, March 3rd.

Website: https://utbeef.tennessee.edu/tennessee-forage-grassland-council/
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/TNFGC

Mason Henson

BY MASON HENSON

My interest in livestock and forage systems began on my family's third-generation cattle farm. There, I learned our operation's success derived from the investments made in the land that supported our livestock. That practical understanding is what led me to study both Animal and Food Sciences and Plant and Soil Sciences at Oklahoma State University. I never saw those disciplines as separate, because plants, cattle, and people are all part of the same system, so working across them felt natural from the beginning.



During my time at OSU, I had the opportunity to be involved in a range of areas, including agronomy, animal science, meat science, range management, and undergraduate research. Those experiences helped me develop a broader understanding of the livestock industry and fostered an appreciation for the numerous moving parts that contribute to making production systems work. That systems mindset is something I carried with me into my master's program in Plant and Soil Sciences at OSU, where I worked on biomass modeling, and later into my Ph.D. in Animal Sciences at Auburn University. My doctoral work focused on forage–livestock interactions, including grass–legume mixtures, tall fescue toxicosis mitigation, and warm-season forage blends evaluated through grazing and metabolism studies. Across those projects, my work centered on improving the predictability and practicality of forage-based cattle systems for producers.

Teaching and extension have always been woven into that process. Throughout graduate school, I taught or assisted in courses ranging from introductory animal science to beef production, and I spent a lot of time in hands-on labs working directly with students. I also taught and presented in extension settings, including field days, grazing academies, producer workshops, and youth livestock events. Those experiences reinforced that people, whether they're 4-H'ers or seasoned cattlemen, learn best when information is straightforward, practical, and tied to real decisions they make every day.

I recently joined Oklahoma State University as an Assistant Professor of Sustainable Livestock Production. While sustainability can be defined by every person, in my role, I view it as paying attention to the whole system, including soils, forages, cattle, and the people managing them. My multidisciplinary background helps me approach problems from several angles at once, and I try to bring that same big-picture perspective to my research and to the classroom. I am looking forward to applying that systems mindset at OSU and contributing to meaningful progress in sustainable livestock production.

Mason B. Henson

Rancher's Resilience Grant

AFGC is excited to announce that the AFGC 2026 Annual Conference has been approved for a Rancher's Resilience Grant. The approved amount is $740.

Deadline to apply is December 21, 2025!

To apply go to this link, https://www.ncba.org/education-resources/rancher-resilience-grant/ncba-rancher-resilience-grant-application

2026 Annual Conference

We are excited to see everyone in Asheville, NC January 12-15!

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