

# Grazing as a Management Tool Summit at Whiterock



Project funded by the DNR REAP-CEP program and the  
Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture  
Whiterock Conservancy 2010

## Project Summary:

**Goals and Objectives:** Gather a diverse group of stakeholders engaged in habitat protection and restoration, cattle production, and rural land management to openly discuss the role of cattle grazing on lands currently managed primarily for wildlife habitat/biodiversity (non-pasture grasslands).

- Discuss the pros and cons, challenges and opportunities
- Identify resource and production management issues related to the topic.
- Comprehensive list of knowledge gaps, research needs, resource needs, and available resources needed to advance the use of grazing as a regular part of managing grasslands for both production and environmental quality.
- Prioritize the pros, cons, challenges, and opportunities to identify key “next” step action items.



# Grazing as a Management Tool Summit

## Basic Project Set-up:

1. Conduct interviews with stakeholders from production, industry, non-profit, prairie restoration, agency, and private landowner groups to compile a list of pre-existing pros, cons, challenges, and opportunities regarding the use of cattle grazing to manage non-pasture grasslands.
2. Host a Grazing as a Management Tool summit
3. Follow-up with survey to producer groups
4. Create a summary documents capturing the key pros, cons, opps, and challenges with recommendations for what to do next.



# Grazing as a Management Tool Summit

## REAP-CEP 2-day Agenda:

1. Introduction to the meeting, fill out pre-meeting survey
2. Introduction presentation by Dr. Tom Rosburg
3. “Perspectives” Presentations
  - a) Highlight the diversity of issues surrounding the topic
  - b) Get as many ideas on to the table as possible
  - c) Set the stage for diving deeply into this topic as quickly as possible
4. Field session at Whiterock properties
  - a) Visit four sites where land management options include grazing with a variety of management outcome possibilities
  - b) Use the site visits to apply group knowledge in the field to generate more ideas and discuss the grazing tool in the field
  - c) Use site visits to “check” our list...are there considerations that are more evident when standing in the field?
5. Evening and Thursday morning group brain storming and priority setting.

# Grazing as a Management Tool Summit

## Pre-meeting Survey:

### Grazing as a Management Tool pre-meeting Survey 10-13-10

Instructions: Please fill out this survey to help us understand your perceptions about the Grazing as a Management Tool before this meeting. This survey is an important part of the REAP-CEP grant process to help measure project outcomes. Your responses will be kept confidential and several weeks after the meeting we will send out a follow-up survey.

*Please note:* "non-pasture grasslands" is a term used in this survey to reference restored/reconstructed prairies and oak savannas, remnant prairies and oak savannas, Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)/ Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) grasslands, land held by private landowners for hunting or other recreational purposes, and public lands such as parks and other open spaces, where grazing is conceptually a compatible land use.

**1** How familiar are you with cattle grazing on non-pasture grasslands from a production standpoint.

1 2 3 4 5  
Not Familiar Very Familiar

**2** How familiar are you with cattle grazing on non-pasture grasslands from a habitat and wildlife perspective?

1 2 3 4 5  
Not Familiar Very Familiar

**3** Cattle grazing is an essential disturbance tool for maintaining and enhancing the ecological health of non-pasture grasslands.

1 2 3 4 5  
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

**4** How important is grazing to the ecological health of non-pasture grasslands when fire is routinely used as a disturbance tool?

1 2 3 4 5  
Not Important Very Important

**5** Grazing non-pasture grasslands is conceptually a "win-win" for producers and the non-pasture grasslands receiving the grazing treatment.

1 2 3 4 5  
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

**6** The potential economic returns of grazing non-pasture grasslands outweigh the potential production constraints involved (installing temporary fence, hauling water, moving cattle, etc).

1 2 3 4 5  
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

**7** Producers and non-pasture grassland managers have the same end result in mind when we talk about "using grazing as a management tool" on these lands.

1 2 3 4 5  
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

**8** Rank your confidence in understanding the forage nutrient content, probable stocking rate, potential production problems like toxic plants or pink eye, when considering grazing cattle on non-pasture grasslands.

1 2 3 4 5  
Not Confident Very Confident

### Grazing as a Management Tool pre-meeting Survey 10-13-10

**9** Cattle grazing can be a tool for protecting non-pasture grasslands from land conversion (to row crops, housing development, etc) by the addition of production-based income on traditionally "low return" acres.

1 2 3 4 5  
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

**10** More, and ecologically healthier, non-pasture grassland will be present on the Iowa landscape if Iowa can better integrate grazing onto the non-pasture grassland landscape.

1 2 3 4 5  
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

**11** Rural economies will benefit from an increased presence of cattle on non-pasture grasslands.

1 2 3 4 5  
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

**12** List five, or fewer, opportunities/benefits to grazing on non-pasture grasslands:

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 \_\_\_\_\_
- 5 \_\_\_\_\_

**13** List five, or fewer, challenges to grazing on non-pasture grasslands:

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 \_\_\_\_\_
- 5 \_\_\_\_\_

**14** List five, or fewer, questions regarding grazing on non-pasture grasslands:

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 \_\_\_\_\_
- 5 \_\_\_\_\_

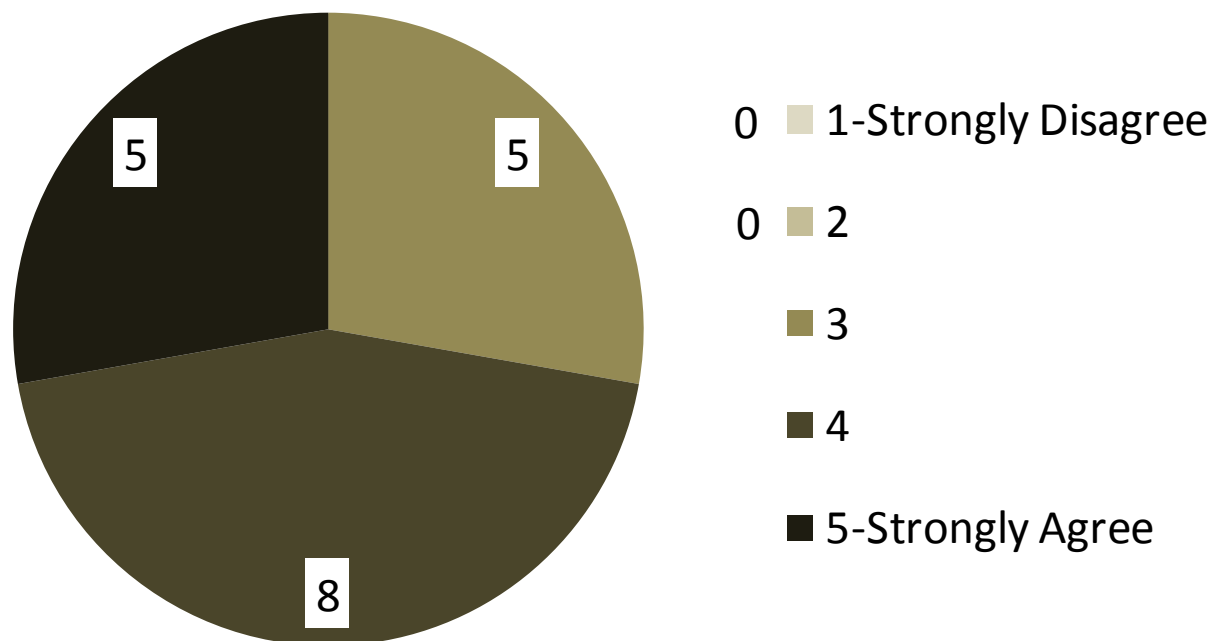
**15** List five, or fewer, assumptions regarding grazing non-pasture grasslands:

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 \_\_\_\_\_
- 5 \_\_\_\_\_

# Grazing as a Management Tool Summit

## Survey Results:

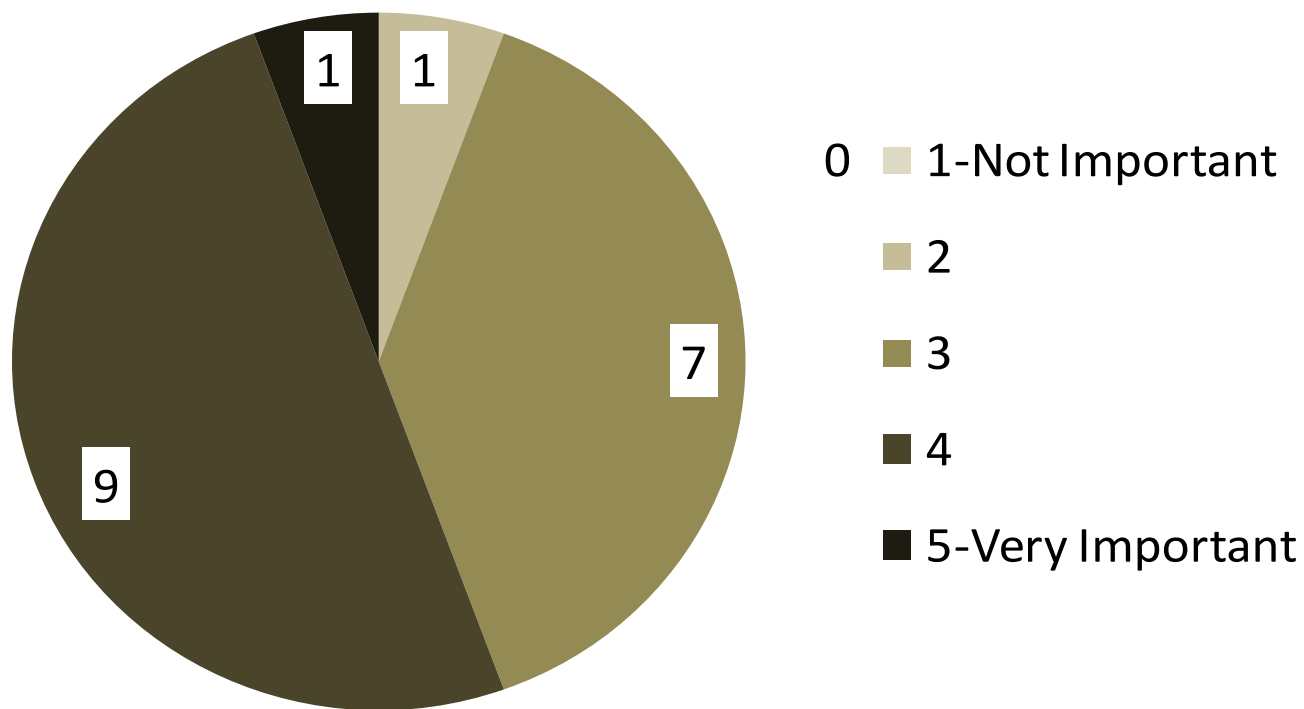
**3. Cattle grazing is an essential disturbance tool for maintaining and enhancing the ecological health of non-pasture grasslands.**



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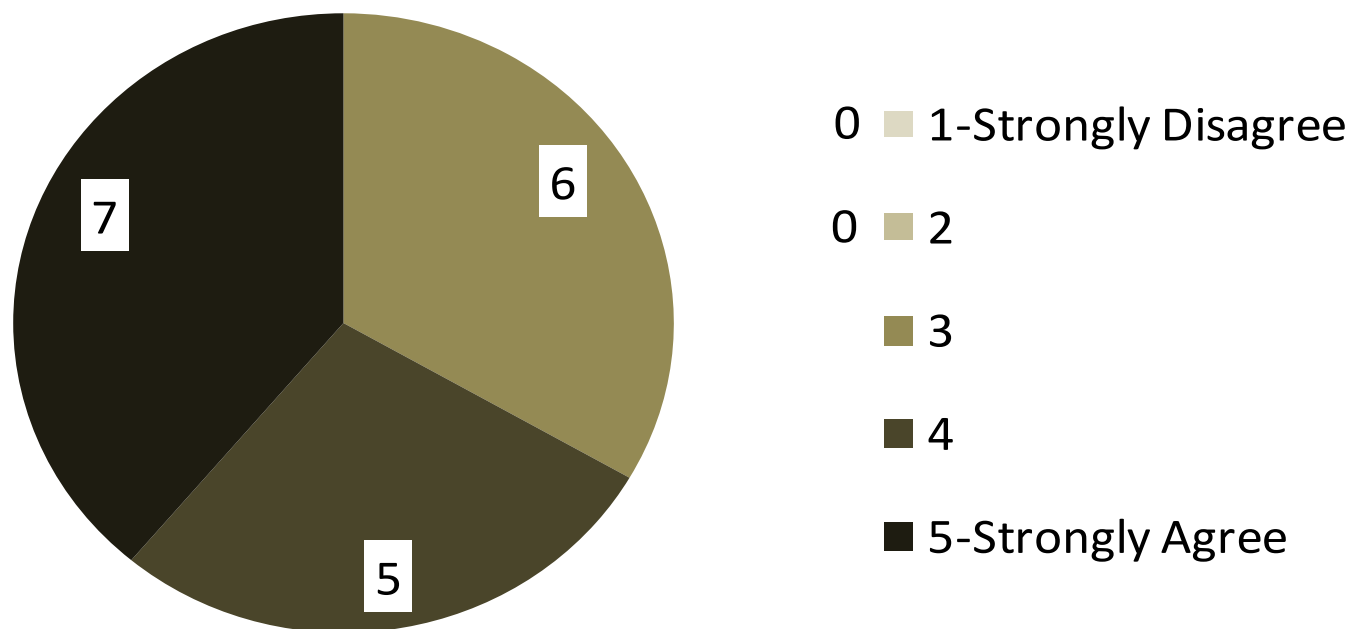
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# Grazing as a Management Tool Summit

Survey Results:

**5. Grazing non-pasture grasslands is conceptually a "win-win" for producers and the non-pasture grasslands receiving the grazing treatment.**

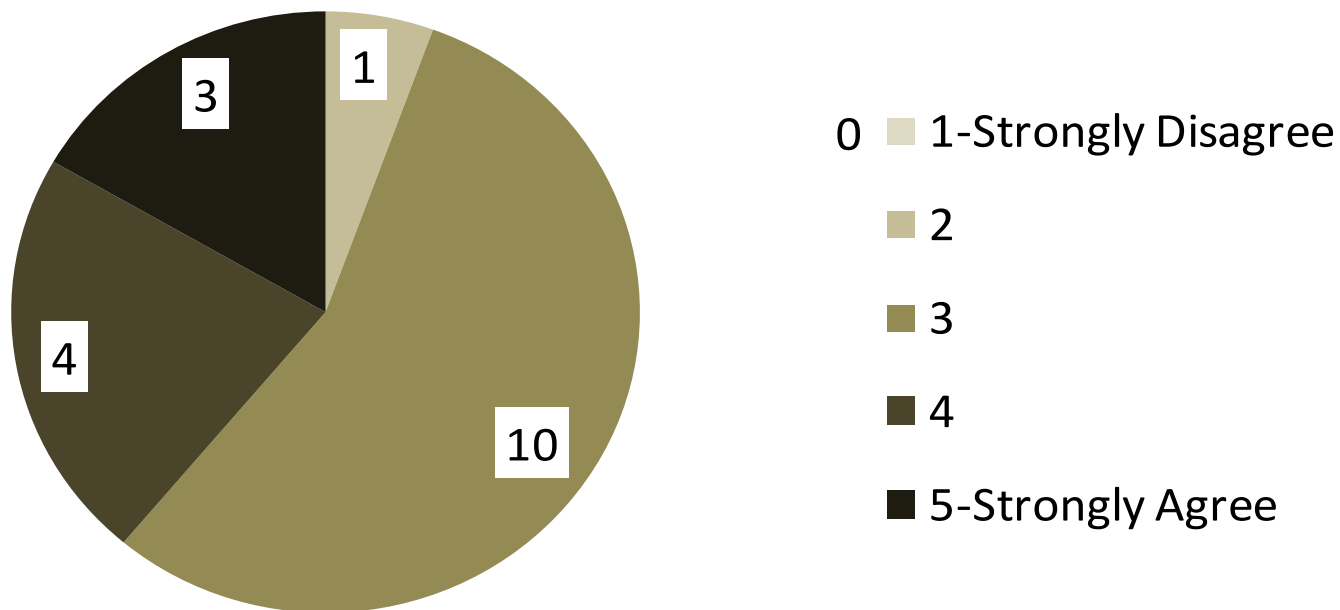




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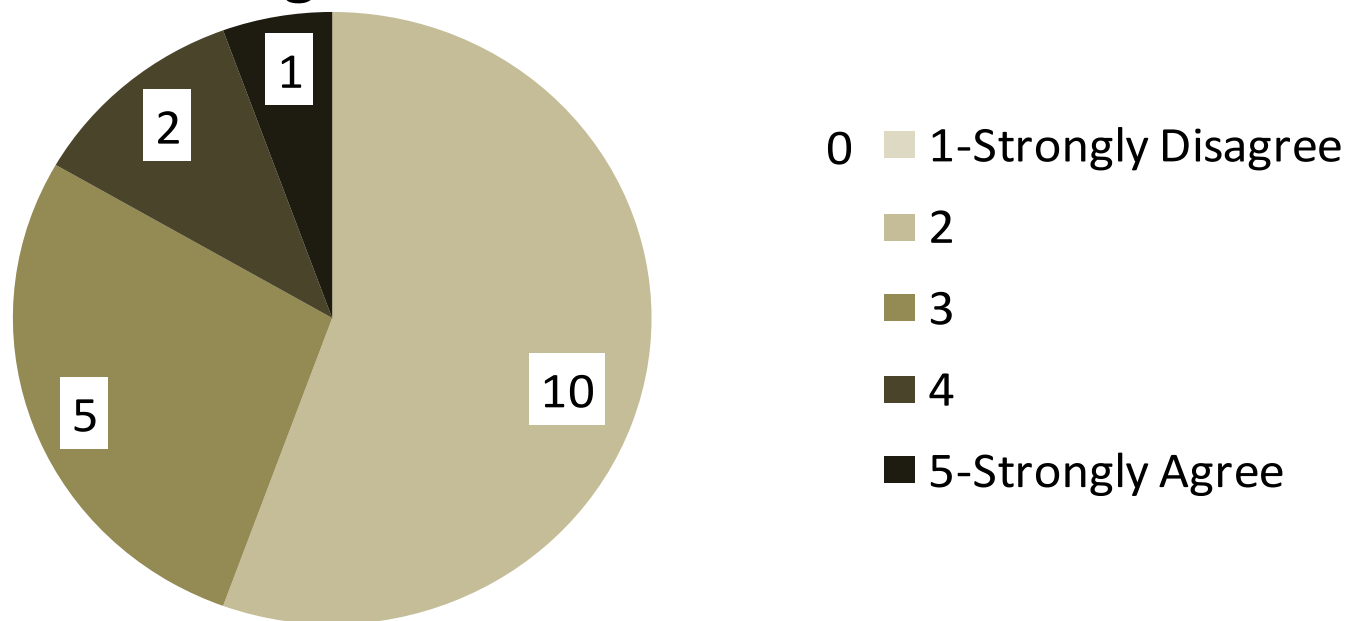
**6. The potential economic returns of grazing non-pasture grasslands outgain the potential production constraints involved (installing temporary fence, hauling water, moving cattle, etc).**



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Survey Results:

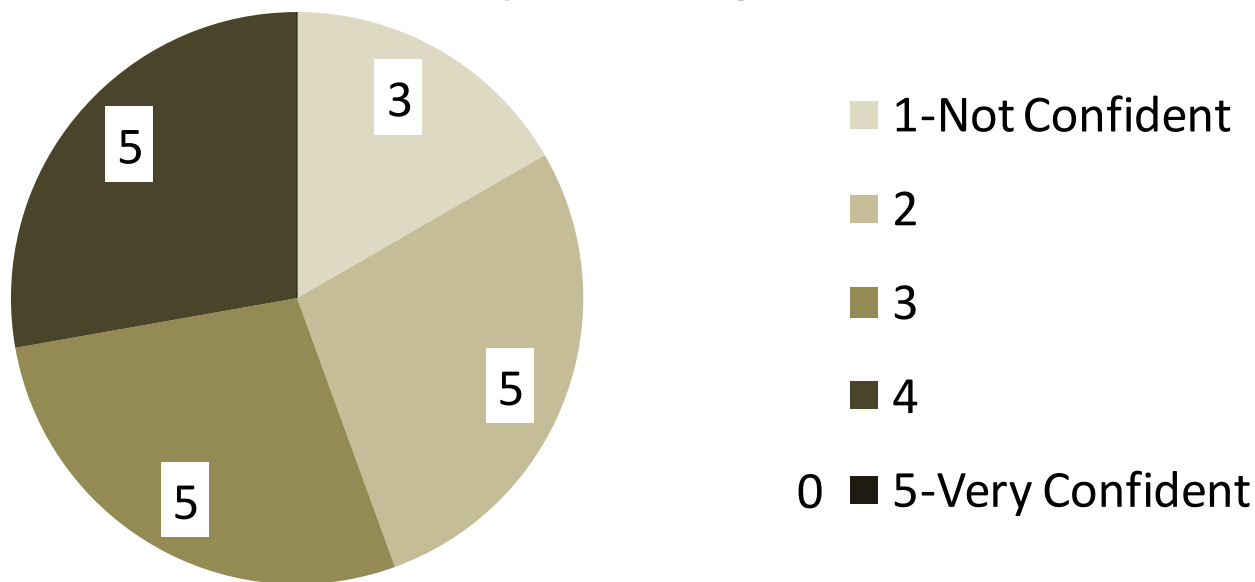
**7. Producers and non-pasture grassland managers have the same end result in mind when we talk about "using grazing as a management tool" on these lands.**



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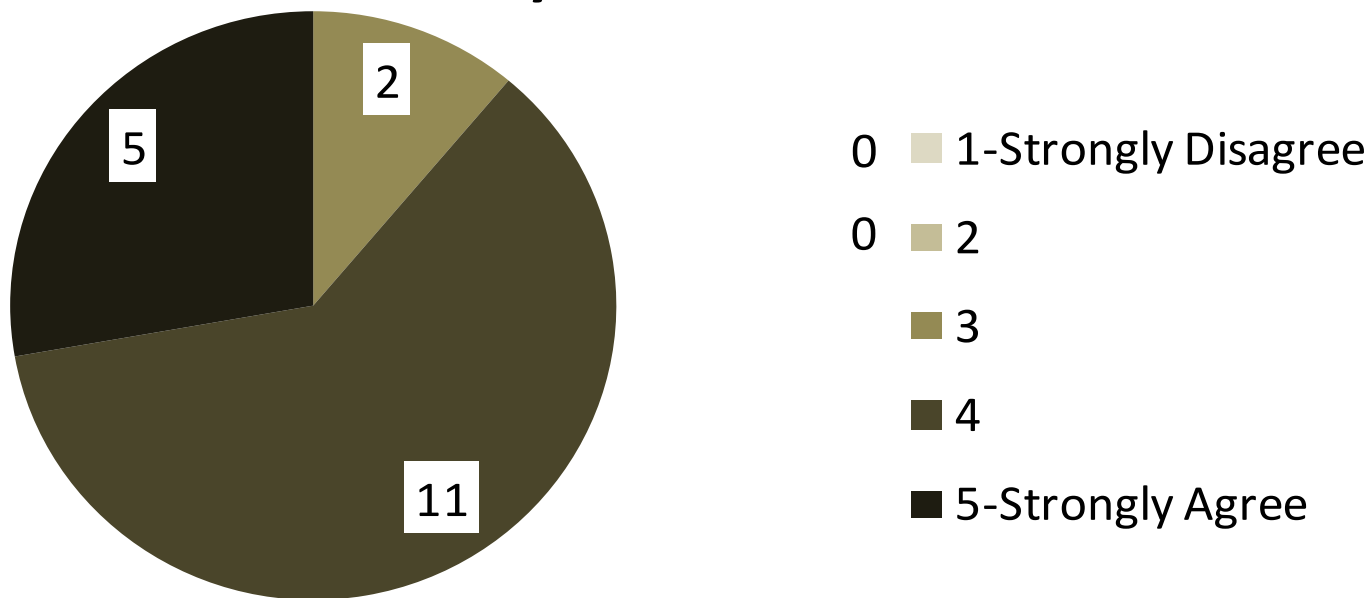
**8. Rank your confidence in understanding the forage nutrient content, probable stocking rate, potential production problems like toxic plants or pink eye, when considering grazing cattle on non-pasture grasslands.**



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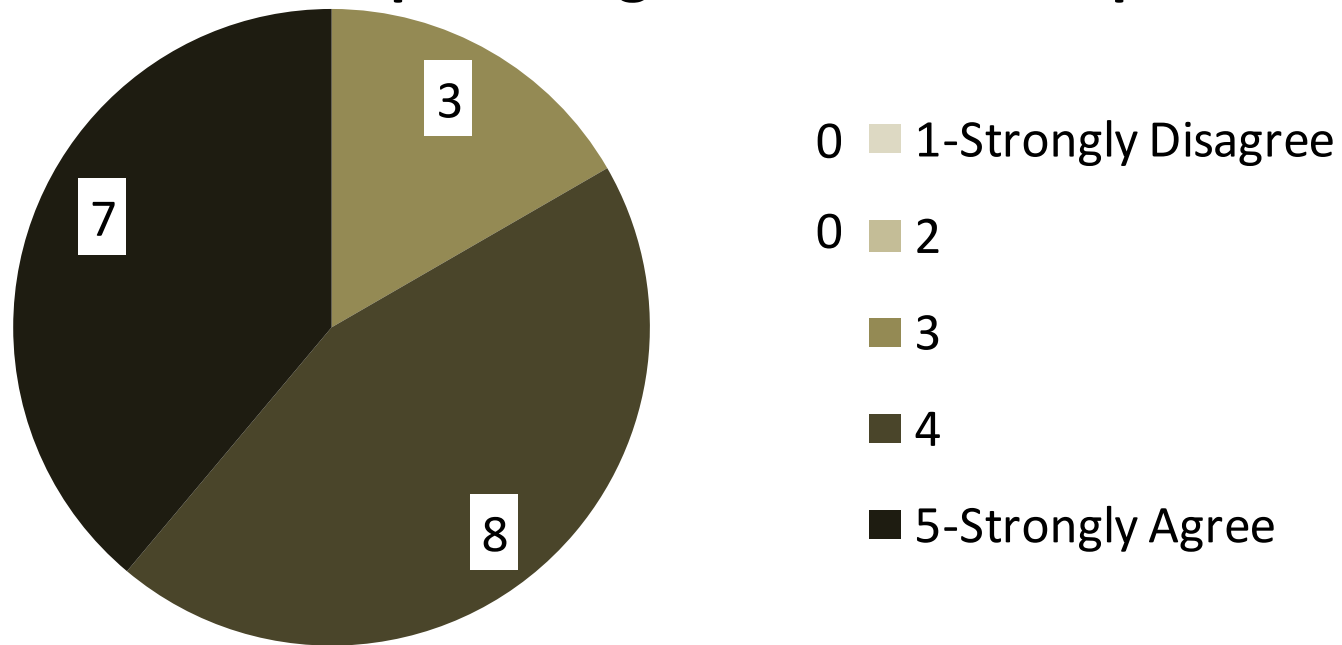
**9. Cattle grazing can be a tool for protecting non-pasture grasslands from land conversion (to row crops, housing development, etc) by the addition of production-based income on traditionally "low return" acres.**



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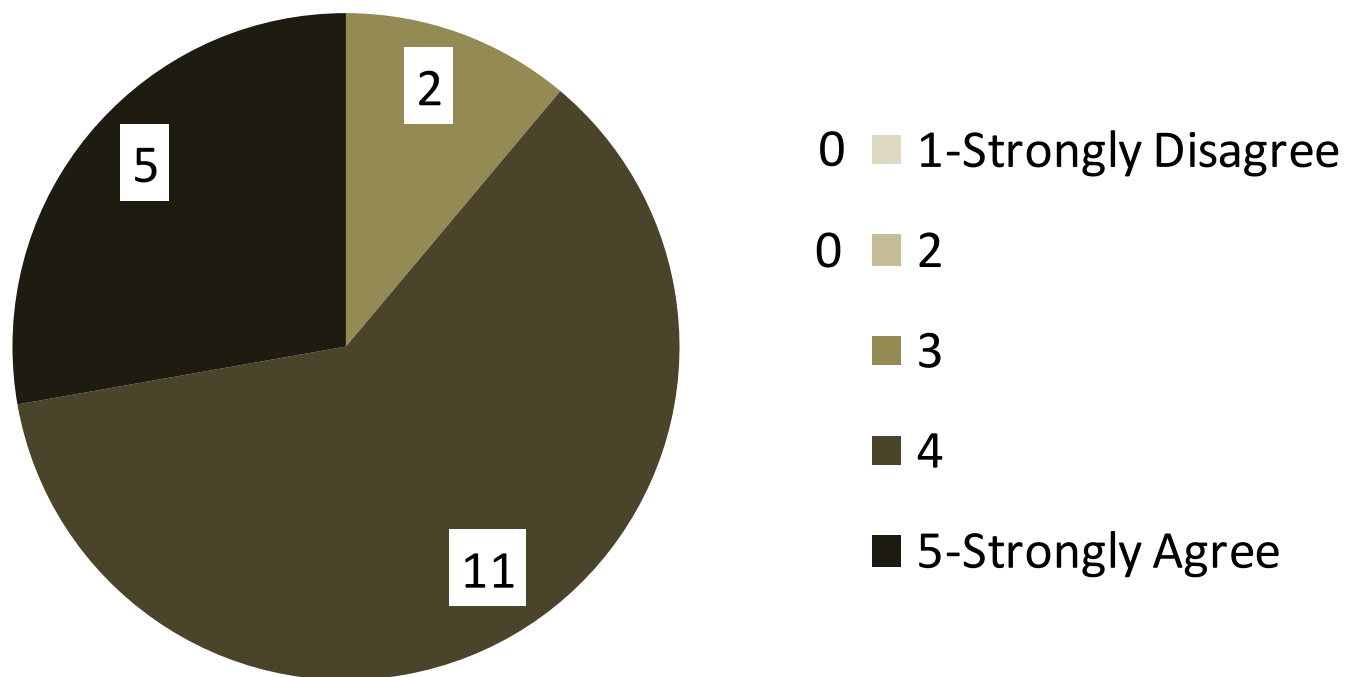
**10. More, and ecologically healthier, non-pasture grassland will be present on the Iowa landscape if Iowa can better integrate grazing onto the non-pasture grassland landscape.**



# Grazing as a Management Tool Summit

Survey Results:

**11. Rural economies will benefit from an increased presence of cattle on non-pasture grasslands.**



# Grazing as a Management Tool Summit

## Survey Results, Summary Statements:

1. Managed cattle grazing on non-pasture grasslands, with or without prescribed fire, is beneficial to grassland health.
2. Grazing of non-pasture grasslands, from the economic returns to grassland health, is conceptually a win-win for producers and grassland health.

# Grazing as a Management Tool Summit

## Survey Results, Summary Statements, continued:

3. Grazing non-pasture grasslands is good. But there are some logistical issues, production concerns, natural resource concerns, and outcome –based differences in opinions that need to be over come. Which means:
  - “it depends”: Every situation is unique.
    - “Graze it a little, but more on the grass, but not too much, and if the cows can avoid disturbing bird nests while they graze, that would be great...”
    - “Exactly what are my cattle eating...rattlesnake master? Yea. Ok.”
    - “So lets see, a week and a half to set up temp fence and water tanks, move 16 head from the home farm 8 miles down the road to your 56 acre prairie, I can leave them there for 6 days...and you’ll be watching in case that’s too much grazing and you’ll let me know... hmmm... sounds, uh, great.”
    - “I’ve spent 8 years reconstructing this prairie, it’s perfect. So you think 80 dry cows on 26 acres for 6 weeks ought to be about right? Geez, I d' know. Oh, but you’ll feed ‘em if they run out of grass. I still don’t. Really? That would be ok, you think?”
  
4. All seem to agree that managed grazing on non-pasture grasslands will:
  - **Open doors for “market-based” grassland protection**
  - **Will benefit Iowa’s rural economy**
  - **Will enhance grassland health**



# Grazing as a Management Tool Summit

Group rank	Opportunities/Benefits to grazing on non-pasture grasslands
1	<p><b><i>Grazing disturbance benefits/promotes vegetative and wildlife diversity, veg. structural diversity</i></b></p> <p>Increase Plant/Structural Diversity</p> <p>Add Disturbance</p> <p>Habitat Diversity for Wildlife</p> <p>Wildlife Diversity</p>
2	<p><b><i>Grazing non-pasture lands provides rest and renovation options for producer's regular pastures</i></b></p> <p>Allow Pastures to Rest &amp; Time for Renovation</p> <p>Allows Time to Renovate Pastures</p>
3	<p><b><i>Grazing will promote soil health</i></b></p> <p>Encourages Healthy Soil</p> <p>Stimulates Carbon Cycling in Grassland</p> <p>Less Commercial Fertilizer Input</p>
4	<b>Added Income</b>
4	<b>Controls Tree Establishment</b>
4	<b>Rural Economic Development</b>

# Grazing as a Management Tool Summit

Group rank	Questions regarding grazing on non-pasture grasslands
1	<b>What level of disturbance is needed?</b>
2	What is a fair rental rate?
2	Who pays for fencing?
2	How is rental rate determined?
3	How do we balance managed grazing & grazing for disturbance?
3	What is the best stocking rate?
3	What kind of stock density works well?
4	Will the public be satisfied if CRP becomes over grazed?
4	Why is it so difficult to implement a basic system to get CRP acres back to
4	How can you graze CRP?
4	What is the nutritional value of non-pasture forage?
4	What classes of animals fit nutrients available?
4	What are the RFV Values?
5	What is the process to evaluate grazing impacts?
5	What are the ecological tradeoffs?
5	How do we educate others (ie. Private recreational landowners)?
5	What are profit margins?
5	How do we get the "experts" to back off long enough to let it happen?

# Grazing as a Management Tool Summit

<b>Group rank</b>	<b>Challenges to grazing non-pasture grasslands</b>
1	Infrastructure Development & Costs (water & fence)
2	Differing Goals of Producer & Land Owner
3	Government Policy/Agency Unwillingness
3	Lack of "How To" Knowledge
3	Agreeing on Restoration Tools
4	Reaching & Involving Absentee Landowners
4	Encouraging Development of Long Term Leases/Partnerships
	<b><i>Changes and added management needs</i></b>
5	Increased Management / Labor / Time
	Shift in Management Strategy

## **Moving forward, today:**

- Assume that there are some differences of opinion on what managed grazing is.
- Assume that there are endless “technical” issues to overcome, most of which can only be addressed on a case-by-case basis.
- Assume that collectively we’ve got the same end result in mind: Economically viable rural communities; restored, protected, and ecologically healthy grasslands; and sustainable food production systems.

**Today, let’s aim to collectively work to advance state and federal policies that better integrate grazing into public and private grassland management systems to the benefit of Iowa’s rural economy *and* environment.**

## Contact Information:

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