



DAIRY GRAZING APPRENTICESHIP OVERVIEW

Dairy farming is an important part of rural economies. Each cow generates approximately \$34,000 of economic activity in the local community each year. But new farmers face significant barriers and are not entering the profession at a rate that offsets the loss of retiring producers. The U.S. loses 5-10% of its dairy farms every year. Because the average age of farmers is 59 years old and many do not have an identified successor, farm loss is expected to continue.

THE SOLUTION

Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship—the first formal Apprenticeship for farming in the nation—was created by and for farmers to address this challenge.

Using the model of education that has prepared skilled workers in the trades for more than a century, DGA combines work-based training with related instruction for the federally recognized occupation of “Dairy Grazier.” A dairy grazier is a farmer who uses managed grazing. In managed grazing systems the majority of farm acres are planted to perennial forages and cows are rotated through paddocks of high quality grasses that are allowed to rest and regrow. Using this cost effective method, dairy graziers are able to restore natural resources, produce high quality milk, and remain profitable in both conventional and value-added markets.

MISSION:

Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship is dedicated to providing a guided pathway to independent dairy farm ownership, developing grazing careers, and strengthening the economic and environmental well-being of rural communities and the dairy industry.

We accomplish this mission by:

- *Linking current and aspiring graziers in the transfer of farms and graziers skills and knowledge.*
- *Developing alliances with agricultural, environmental, and consumer groups.*
- *Providing opportunities for farmers and their customers to invest in the next generation of grazing farmers.*

PROGRAM AND ORGANIZATION

DGA is 501(c)3 non-profit organization. Its training program is a National Apprenticeship registered with the U.S. Department of Labor-Employment and Training Administration.

The Apprenticeship consists of 4,000 hours of training over a period of two years. Of these hours, 3,700 hours are employment and mentoring under an approved Mentor Dairy Grazier. A comprehensive *DGA Training Manual* (or “Job Book”) lays out the competencies that must be met in order to own and operate a managed-grazing dairy farm, providing a blueprint for the mentoring process.

The other 300 hours are related instruction designed to enhance on-farm training. Related instruction, including custom courses delivered through DGA's online school, Managed Grazing Innovation Center:

- Courses in Dairy Cattle Nutrition, Feeds & Feeding, Milk Quality, Dairy Cattle Health & Wellness, Soil & Water Resources Management, Farm Financial Management, and Managed Grazing Systems for Dairy Cattle
- Peer Discussion Groups, Pasture Walks, Farming Conferences, and Networking Opportunities
- Holistic Management and Professional Development Training

Each Mentor-Apprentice pair is assigned a local Education Coordinator, who monitors the mentoring relationship and provides educational support and on-farm technical services. Apprentices not only gain skills, knowledge, and experience but also develop relationships with Apprentices and Mentors in their cohort as well as with other dairy farmers, agricultural professionals, and service providers in the local community.

Apprentices graduate to certified Journey Dairy Grazier status, receive additional support services as they advance in their career, and have the option of eventually becoming Mentors and taking on Apprentices themselves in this unique farmer training program.

DGA provides business planning for Apprentices and Mentors. Opportunities are available to Journey Dairy Graziers to advance into management, equity earning, farm start-up or farm transfer. DGA is an approved vendor for Farm Services Agency.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY PLEDGE

DGA is an equal opportunity employer. The recruitment, selection, employment, and training of Apprentices during their Apprenticeship, shall be without discrimination because of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, or sexual orientation. The sponsor will take affirmative action to provide equal opportunity in Apprenticeship and will operate the Apprenticeship program as required under Title 29 of the Code of Federal Regulations, part 30.

The development of DGA has been supported in part by 2010, 2011, 2014, and 2017 grants from the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP) of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, USDA. To find more resources and programs for beginning farmers and ranchers please visit New Farmers (<https://newfarmers.usda.gov/>) and Farm Answers (<https://farmanswers.org/>) websites, which are projects of BFRDP.