



“If you pray for rain be ready to deal with mud”

or

“Keep your eye on your long-term goals”

or

“The recent history of the NC Forage and Grassland Council”

Matt Poore

My sister sent me a card a “couple” of years ago when I was telling her about how muddy we were. This was only two years after the drought of 2007, when of course I had spent a lot of time praying for rain. The card showed a cute child in boots stomping through mud, and the caption read “If you pray for rain be ready to deal with mud”. It really made me smile, and to realize that I spend way too much time complaining about the short-term issues I have to deal with, rather than being thankful for all we have and rejoicing in life regardless of the challenges that face us daily. Having a long term goal in mind really can help you get through those daily struggles. I am trying to think about that as I watch yet another wet system rolling in from the gulf! I have never seen mud like this in my life!

I have come to realize in the last few years that the key to my happiness is to accept these challenges, and to do my best to deal with them, but to keep in mind that I am fortunate to have the freedom to pursue my dreams in an environment where hard work and dedication almost always pay off.

About 15 years ago I remember sitting down with Jim Green and discussing the status of the NC Forage and Grassland Council. The organization was the fifth state affiliate of the American Forage and Grassland Council, and was founded in 1972. By the time I came on the scene in 1990 the organization was healthy with a membership of about 200, and activities including a summer field day that rotated across the state, and an annual business meeting in association with the North Carolina Cattlemen’s Conference. As time went along during the 1990s, the organization gradually went into decline, with reduced numbers of members and a gradual loss of the regular activities.

We made several attempts to revive the organization with activities such as the NC Grazing Schools, but despite our efforts the decline continued. As we talked to colleagues that worked in other states it became clear that that pattern was also occurring in other state affiliates. It seems that our problems boiled down to a loss of energy by the public servants (us!) that generally ran these organizations. One or two champions that were already too busy was just not sufficient to sustain such an organization. At one point in the early 2000s, Dr. Green was preparing to retire and our activities had declined down to

just the annual business meeting at the Cattlemen's Conference where we operated like a committee of the NC Cattlemen's Association. Every year we had an educational program at that meeting and we would usually have about 100 to attend, but most of the participants were not members and didn't even realize we were an independent organization.

A key event occurred in 2008 that would change the direction of the organization. V. Mac Baldwin, a long-term member of NCFGC and owner of Baldwin Beef in Caswell County was elected to the national board of AFGC. V. Mac made a mission of reviving our state affiliate and was elected president in 2008. V. Mac served two terms on the national board and he received the AFGC Merit Award in 2015. Under V. Mac's leadership we revived our board with energetic members and set off to grow the organization. We combined efforts in January of 2008 with the Virginia Forage and Grassland Council to present a winter conference series with one location being Oxford, NC and three locations in Virginia. We had a very strong program that attracted over 100 participants, the largest event we had hosted in a number of years. Based on that success, we decided the next year to put on our own winter conference series at 3 locations in 2009. This series attracted nearly 250 participants, and the membership grew.

After 9 years of solid winter conferences, the membership grew to nearly 200 by 2018, making us the third largest state affiliate. Great speakers, including Ray Archuleta, made these events more and more popular. Each year we had strong leadership from our presidents that followed V. Mac, including Wistar Heald, Johnny Rogers, Eddie Leagans, Mark Hucks, Ronnie Holman, Brent Creech, Buron Lanier, Adam Ross and Teresa Herman. The organization was clearly on an upward trajectory. Participation gradually increased in all the events, and board meetings became well attended, exciting and packed with energy.

We identified public servants, producers, and industry personnel that really believed in the mission and whom were willing to invest energy in our future. We also added a student intern to help with marketing the organization to younger potential members. Most importantly, the advisors from the university took a back seat to the board when it came to making decisions, and when assigning important tasks necessary to sustain the organization. Consistent and talented producer leadership has carried the organization far.

In 2018 we decided to up our game and invited Jim Gerrish to be our featured speaker for the winter conference series. Jim is one of the most sought after speakers on the Grazing Management scene today, and while he was very expensive, we decided to take a risk to take the organization to the next level. We also expanded to four locations to better reach the entire state.

As it turned out, everyone was excited to have such a great speaker and we attracted over 400 participants. This year we again have a nationally known speaker, Kathy Voth, who has a unique outlook on weed control, a very experienced weed scientist, Neil Rhodes from the University of Tennessee, and our regional agronomists from NCDA&CS. The idea is to give participants a broad look at their options for an integrated weed control program. By the time you read this we will have completed that series and we trust it will be another success.

Today, I am writing this on the way home from the 2019 AFGC annual conference which was held in St. Louis, MO. We had a great delegation of 27 from North Carolina and had participants in the Youth Essay Contest, the Forage Spokesman Contest, the National Forage Bowl Competition (with teams from both NCSU and Mount Olive University), and the Emerging Scientist competition. At the closing banquet we learned that we took 2nd in the Youth Essay Contest (Mason Blinson), 3rd in the Forage Spokesman

Contest (Tim Kelley), 2nd in the Forage Bowl (NCSU), and 3rd in the Emerging Scientist Competition (Sam Ingram). Also, Buron Lanier was elected to the national board, and Ronnie Holman was elected to be vice president.

I am very proud of how far we have come with the North Carolina Forage and Grassland Council. If you are not a member of this great organization I encourage you to join. With your membership in our state council you also become a member of the national organization, AFGC.

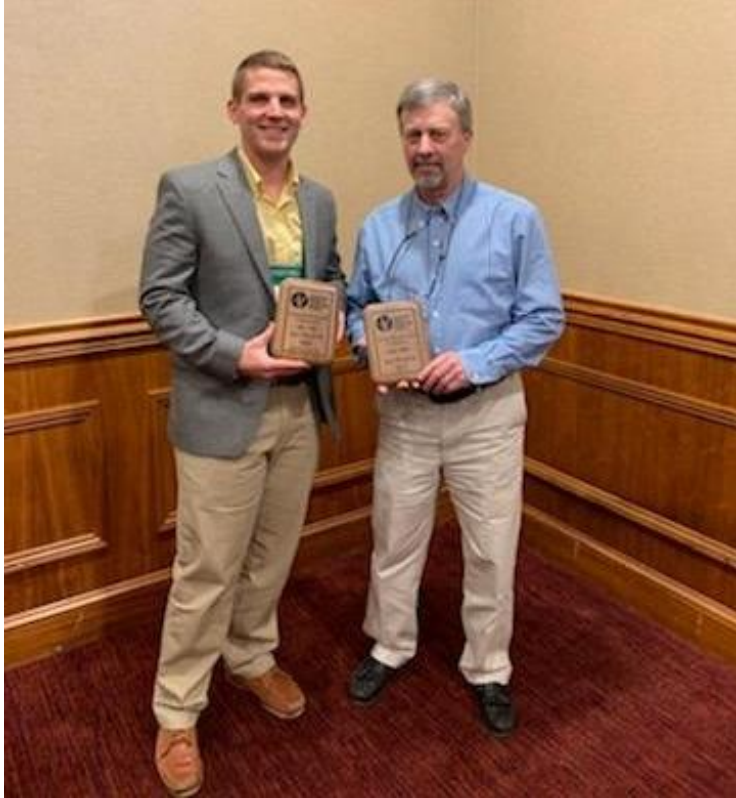
Over the years we experienced a lot of “mud” getting the council turned around and growing again. I am glad we didn’t give up in despair. Being tenacious when facing challenges is the most important thing my Mom and Dad and other friends have taught me over the years. The ground will dry out and we will be praying for rain again someday. Don’t let all that get in your way.

Join us this next week (January 22 to 25) for the NC Forage and Grassland Council Winter Conference Series. Locations include Canton, NC, January 22; Salisbury, NC, January 23; Oxford, NC, January 24; and Mount Olive, NC, January 25. The program runs from 9:30 am to 4:00 pm each day

To register go to this website:

<https://www.nccattle.com/nc-forage-grasslands-council/events/winter-conference/registration>

Come help us grow this exciting organization!



Sam Ingram from the Department of Animal Science (left) was third in the Emerging Scientist Competition, and Tim Kelley from Clyde, NC (right) was third in the Forage Spokesman Competition at the 2019 AFGC Conference.



Part of the NC delegation at AFGC.



The NCSU Forage Bowl Team. From Left to Right, Dr. Lori Snyder, Coach from the Department of Crop and Soil Science, Thomas Shea, Tanner Lisk, Troy Givan, Charlotte Talbott, Kinsey Everhart, and Sam Ingram, Coach from the Department of Animal Science.