



# Community Grazing Prospectus

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## Overview

The goal of our Community Grazing Project is multifaceted. Our primary goal is to build resilience by transforming our wildland-urban-interface (WUI) from neighborhoods into communities, through the subtle force of grazing ruminants. At the same time we'll be increasing each community's ability to withstand wildfire and drought by grazing livestock across property lines. Our existing model, the Penngrove Grazing Project, operates in the WUI of Penngrove, CA, where it has demonstrated success building community connections, mitigating fuel fire loads, and sequestering carbon in the soil. Our proposal is to scale this model and establish 5 grazing cooperatives over the next 2 years in Sonoma and surrounding counties. We will continue to prioritize work within socioeconomically disadvantaged rural residential neighborhoods, since our model leverages the mutual benefits of providing feed to livestock owners and fire risk reduction to their neighbors, requiring no financial input by the residents. The proposed project will be spearheaded by Sarah Keiser who founded and operates the Penngrove Grazing Project, providing grazing services to six neighbors for free. Under Sarah's guidance three community grazing programs have been developed in West Petaluma and Penngrove. The proposed body of work will support the growth of this system throughout rural residential communities.

## Need For Change

1. Fire has hit all of California and the west with unprecedented destruction, and the WUI is uniquely vulnerable to this destruction. These communities, inhabited by aging, rural populations and/or with limited incomes, face increased fire risk, threats to homeowners insurance, and a high cost of local labor to address brush clearing. This program addresses the desperate need for improved fire fuel reduction in rural residential neighborhoods of Sonoma County/Northern California, while considering the financial limitations of these communities by providing a symbiotic, non-fiscal relationship where both or all parties receive benefits without financial implications.
2. A community's ability to adapt to and survive natural disasters is dependent upon building strong relationships at the neighborhood scale. However, social cohesion in many rural residential neighborhoods is low. Our program would address both these needs.



## Context

One of the most pressing issues in our culture is the lack of connection to the land and to our community. Community grazing programs naturally address these issues in a collaborative way, building morale and harmony in rural residential neighborhoods and between diverse grazing and agriculture methods.

What makes community grazing projects so ideal at resolving these issues is the flexibility of the model. Most current community grazing projects began with a neighbor with livestock, creating a relationship with neighbors who have unused pastures that have become a burden and moving their livestock into these unused pastures. However, there are many other possible methodologies. A group of neighbors in West Petaluma interested in developing their own grazing cooperative were clear and 100% in agreement that they did not want to manage livestock year round. In order to meet their goal of fire fuel removal without year round animal care we discussed purchasing lambs from a local farm to populate their grazing program ( Bodega Pastures for example), use prescribed grazing to move them around the neighborhood until they had grazed all of their fire load. When the animals have cleared their fire fuel load through grazing and the season has caused the grass to stop growing they will harvest the lambs to provide food for the neighborhood grazing cooperative and donate one lamb to a local food bank. This method supports local sheep farms, provides fire mitigation, carbon sequestration and nourishment, as well as endorsing a culture of giving.

In the hope of creating a strong and supportive relationship with large scale regenerative graziers we are currently working with Dr. Stephanie Larson with the UCANR (University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources) as well as large- to medium-scale graziers to create a network of new graziers coming into the field. The UCANR has a grazing school which educates students on prescribed grazing and animal husbandry. Medium to large-scale graziers commonly seek interns that can provide labor while learning the knowledge and skills necessary to successfully manage a grazing operation. We hope to recruit individuals for the UCANR school, some of whom will be interested in working with and being trained by successful graziers.

Newly trained graziers without land or livestock, can begin their grazing operations in a small way with community support and assistance by managing one or two community grazing programs that do not have a skilled shepherd to manage the flock. We hope to build and nurture these relationships in an effort to redefine the relationship between small and large scale agriculture operations.

## Budget

### I. The following 3 sample budgets for a Community Grazing Cooperative.

These sample budgets give an example of the cost of implementing a new grazing projec. Grazing cooperatives have variable budget due to:

1. The flexibility of the model
2. The amount of and quality of fencing currently on the properties involved
3. The amount of livestock already present in the neighborhood
4. If the community has a shepherd to manage the flock

These give an estimate on the necessary financial input to establish each individual grazing cooperative. They do not demonstrate the costs of ongoing support and community building that will be necessary to keep the cooperatives going.

| Sample Grazing Rotation Materials Costs / Budget |                 |                  |                  |
|--|-----------------|------------------|------------------|
|  | Sample I        | Sample II        | Sample III       |
| Fences - Electric, Portable,                     | 2 x 82' - \$246 | 3 x 164' - \$492 | 3 x 164' = \$492 |
| Livestock purchase                               |                 |                  | 5 lambs = \$750  |
| Fence energizers -                               | 275             | 375              | 375              |
| Water tubs w/float                               | 43              | 43               | 43               |
| Tub floats                                       |                 |                  | 20               |
| Water buckets black rubber                       |                 |                  | 20               |
| Electrified tape for cows                        | 55              | 55               |                  |
| Insulators                                       | 32              | 32               |                  |
| Tape reel  | 42              | 42               |                  |
| Posts  | 20 - \$80       | 20 - \$80        |                  |
| Consulting & Support By Sarah Keiser             | 250             | 300              | 450              |
| Total  | \$1023.00       | \$1419.00        | \$2150.00        |

- II. The secondary financial need is to fund Sarah Keiser as a consultant to support, build and assist in the development of these diverse, relationship driven, land management systems.

|                     |                                  |
|---------------------|----------------------------------|
| Consulting Services | \$50 an hour - ongoing as needed |
|---------------------|----------------------------------|

## Program Goals & Evaluation

### I. Measurable Goals & Outcomes

- A. **Number of community grazing projects.** There are currently 4 grazing programs that have been successfully developed through the support of Sarah Keiser. In 2020 we plan to assist in the implementation of 2 more. Continuing to see an increase by 2 to 3 community grazing coops annually.
- B. **Number of acres grazed as community grazing projects.** Community grazed land will grow at an approximate rate of 10% (by acre) annually. The total acreage in 2019 is 54, so in 2020 we expect 59. In 2021, 66
- C. **Increased carbon sequestration.** Using COMET-planner, we will demonstrate carbon drawdown of approximately 1.5 Mg CO<sub>2</sub>e per acre. Since this is a community-driven project, individual neighborhoods will determine themselves how to prioritize carbon sequestering practices or other grazing priorities.
- D. **Fire mitigation.** According to Blue Forest Conservation: *On private land, the cost of forest restoration is severely problematic for owners, who are typically families and individual forest landowners. In a recent **survey conducted by AFF**, 77 percent of landowners cited cost as a top barrier to creating a fire afresilient forest. This challenge doesn't come as a surprise given that the average landowner makes less than \$100,000 a year and the costs to thin and remove fuels often exceeds \$2,000 per acre. Our community grazing projects are working to provide fire mitigation at little to no cost to the people that need it the most.*
- E. **Increased interest, education and opportunities for young people to move into regenerative agriculture.** Through our collaborative efforts with UCANR grazing school and local graziers we will recruit, train and develop 2 - 5 new graziers and/or regenerative agriculture students annually.

- F. **Decrease burn out for current successful graziers by providing interns that can provide labor and developing community support & value.** Through the grazing school affiliated with Sonoma County University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources extension we will train 2-5 graziers annually. Providing 1-4 interns to graziers annually. We will follow up with graziers and interns to analyze the success of the internship for both parties and to determine how many of the interns continue as graziers or in regenerative agriculture. Measured and tracked primarily through surveys of those that receive interns & the interns.

## II. Proposed Outcomes

- A. Increased community resiliency through the grazing projects by building strong relationships among neighbors as well as a culture of helping each other.
- B. Developing a strong attachment to agriculture and an understanding of animal husbandry to diminish negative media input.
- C. Development and growth of a program that can assist rural residential neighborhoods across the west and the country.
- D. Carbon sequestration and fire fuel reduction are two measurable benefits of prescribed grazing. Some community grazing programs will be highly committed to implementing multiple Carbon Farming practices such as hedgerows, trees, shrubs and windbreak plantings, fencing off riparian areas & compost application to their pastures. We plan to support each community grazing cooperative with their unique vision and our primary goal is to increase community resilience and communication among these rural residential communities.

## Work Plan

With the increase in fire and drought, as well as an aging and/or gentrifying population that is not capable of doing their own property maintenance, rural residential neighborhoods in Northern California are struggling. Our program would address this problem with the support of the Sonoma County University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources extension and local graziers, we will recruit and train new neighborhood groups interested in prescribed grazing. The newly recruited neighborhood graziers will be encouraged to attend the UCANR grazing school and to intern with fee based graziers. By building these positive, collaborative relationships we hope to redefine the interaction and create connection between small and large agricultural services.

We must illustrate and discuss our measurable outcomes of our Community Grazing Projects, but we are far more attached to what may be perceived as a secondary positive outcome. The



transformation of a neighborhood into a community. The development of intimate and supportive relationships that can stem the tragedies of natural disasters and food shortages. By adding gates into pasture fencing to create an opportunity for the grazing animals to move between neighbors we innately establish a shared experience and caretaking model. The cooperative community grazing model breaks down disputes due to political and personal differences simply because it does not directly address them.

We have found with our current grazing cooperatives the natural development within all participants of a larger ecological experience through the improved soil, increased plant diversity and enhanced aesthetics of their neighborhood. It is quite profound to witness the increase in awareness simply from the greater connection with the grazing animals and their positive impact. These changes may seem inadvertent or unplanned, but they are the natural and concurrent evolution that takes place with a grazing cooperative.

Sarah Keiser has successfully established and grown her Penngrove Grazing Project using her community building skills and her passion for regenerative agriculture with little financial input. She has built interest in her model through public speaking, participating on panels & social media. There are many interested individuals and communities looking to get consulting and/or financial support for beginning their program. As well as organizations that want to support the cooperative grazing system. Sarah has volunteered her time to help build 4 additional community grazing programs. At this time seed funding will help support the consulting services and necessary supplies to establish more community grazing projects.

*“The true remedy for mistakes is to keep from making them. It is not in the piecemeal technological solutions that our society now offers, but in a change of cultural (and economic) values that will encourage in the whole population the necessary respect, restraint and care. Even more important, it is in the possibility of settled families and local communities, in which the knowledge of proper means and methods, proper moderations and restraints, can be handed down, and so accumulate in place and stay alive; the experience of one generation is not adequate to inform and control its actions.”*

*Wendel Berry*

## Funding

We are currently seeking funding to continue to build new community grazing cooperatives and to serve current projects. Sarah Keiser has been volunteering her



time for outreach, education and support of new and established community grazing cooperatives. Some of them are being developed in low income neighborhoods where the initial costs are prohibitive and make it infeasible for that community to begin their cooperative. Leaving them and their community with high fire loads and potential financial crisis due to fire.

Fibershed (501c3) is our fiscal sponsor.