

First Pasture Walk 2009

“Weather” it feels like it or not in northeastern Indiana, it really is supposed to be spring! Despite temperatures averaging 10 to 15 degrees below normal, the signs of spring are slowly becoming apparent, with buds pushing on the trees, grass starting to green up, and now, the LaGrange County Pasture Walk season kicks off with its first program of the year.



Left: If you look carefully, you will see the question mark shape on the forehead of one of Pasture Walk host Lavern Bontrager's calves. She says the calf is asking "Where are milk prices headed in 2009?"

April's Pasture Walk was hosted this past Tuesday, April 14, by the Lavern Bontrager family. The Bontragers operate a certified organic dairy farm a few miles northwest of LaGrange. Lavern farms 80 acres, running his dairy operation as a management intensive rotational grazing farm. His cattle

eat forages like ryegrass, clovers, alfalfa, orchard grass, turnips and forage peas to enable them to generate the milk that is his farm's principle marketable product.

This first Pasture Walk of the year was attended by 43 area farmers representing 6 Indiana and Michigan counties. Major topics of discussion for this event were the costs and technical aspects of calf raising, nutrient and manure management on the farm, and the challenges posed by a cold, wet spring.

The Pasture Walk program has been sponsored by the LaGrange County SWCD and USDA's NRCS since 2000. The events are held on a monthly basis, April through November, and are usually held the second Tuesday afternoon of each month from 1:00 to 3:00 pm. A typical program usually involves a short introduction and a walking tour of an area farm. Dairy production is of special interest to many, however, Pasture Walks can be of great help to anyone involved in grazing livestock of any type, from goats and sheep to dairy, beef, poultry and even bison and llamas. The program is a grass-roots, producer based event that is strongly committed to dealing with the practical aspects and challenges of making a living on a small to medium sized family farm.

Pasture Walks are open to anyone interested rotational grazing or in otherwise improving their farm's productivity. For more information, please contact the LaGrange County SWCD Soil and Water Conservation District at 260-463-3471, extension 3.