

# Draft Animal Power Network

from the inaugural quarterly DAPNet newsletter

by Louis Battalen

The goal of the Draft Animal Power Network is to provide year-round educational and networking opportunities, highlighting ongoing efforts of people throughout the region who are educating, mentoring and building community around animal power and renewable land use.

Our network of draft animal-power enthusiasts began in the fall of 2005 when Carl Russell and Lisa McCrory, owners and operators of Earthwise Farm and Forest of Bethel, Vermont held a horse-logging weekend workshop at their farm. “The sense of community ran high,” recalls McCrory, an organic dairy and livestock consultant. Twenty presenters were on hand and forty participants attended, and from that first experience “it was clear that a larger more comprehensive community gathering would be well received.” That vision has now become the framework for our new membership organization, the Draft Animal Power Network (DAPNet).

After a one year hiatus, and seeking to accommodate more attendees, the 2007 gathering moved to the larger venue of the Tunbridge Fairgrounds in nearby Tunbridge, and expanded the program’s focus, using draft animals in both forestry and farming demonstrations and exposing participants to the practical application of methods, techniques, and equipment in a trade fair and conference venue. The couple’s hope was that the Northeast Animal-Power Field Days (NEAPFD) would become an annual gathering where folks from all over the northeast could come to expect access to some of the most current resources available in the field of draft animal power. Sure enough, as a result of the field days, a network of people and resources for draft animal power began to emerge. “We became a clearinghouse for contacts, events, items and animals wanted or for sale, and other resources, which has grown into a year-round enterprise,” says Russell, a horse logger and forestry consultant.

An online forum called *Draft Animal Power* ([www.draftanimalpower.com](http://www.draftanimalpower.com)), was established after the 2007 event, attracting an international following of more than 1200 followers by 2008 and servicing 2,864 by the beginning of 2011. By 2009 the couple realized, as they wrote in that year’s program notes, “that these field days are really just two days out of a year-round endeavor for most of us.” Carl and Lisa had become “increasingly aware of the connections that this event has helped to foster among a diverse community of interest...around the use of animal power and renewable land-use.” The three-day event that includes field and forestry intensives, classroom style workshops, equipment demonstrations, swap meets, local food vendors and a community kitchen, was attracting 1,000 people. The organization of the NEAPFD events and the maintenance of the online forum, however, brought in associated costs that went above and beyond the income returned from the annual events. The two of them, as primary organizers, put in hundreds of hours each year, assisted by an ever-

changing corps of volunteers. It had become time, they and others realized, that “forming an official organization would be the best way to share in the effort so that we can all gain from the connections that resulted from NEAPFD.”

Time was set-aside on Sunday, Oct 17, on the last day of the NEAPFD, to discuss the future of the network. Conferees, visitors and teamsters, alike, gathered to hear from Carl and Lisa about their Herculean efforts in organizing this annual event and in operating the web sites. It was agreed that more hands needed to take responsibility in handling the lines, and, fortuitously and just as significantly, more minds wanted to play a role. From that meeting, a series of late autumn and early winter conference calls, some involving more than 20 members, were held. A transition team of eight was selected. Committees were created and immediately set to work. Rural Vermont was selected as the group’s fiscal sponsor. A partnership with the Northeast Organic Farming Association was formed to hold the 5th annual NEAPFD concomitantly with that organization’s summer conference at the University of Massachusetts Amherst campus. In January, a board of directors was selected and officers were elected. Drafts of a mission statement were shared on the draft forum and in e-mails; the concern for accuracy and succinctness was very evident and the love for this nascent organization quickly discernible and quite palpable in the respect and consideration shown each other.

Carl and Lisa are encouraged and pleased by the progress of the last few months, especially, says Carl, “by the large core group that has stepped up to participate in organizing and administering the growth of the network.” At the same time, he adds, “it is interesting how the networking seems to be hidden from the view of many people who rely on us for the connectivity. This is why we feel that an organization providing networking services to this community needs to be formalized so that it is more recognizable and can have access to other sources of funding such as grants.”

The Draft Animal Power Network’s mission is advancing the use of draft animals and promoting sustainable land stewardship by providing resource connections and shared learning opportunities while building community. Presently, we provide our website [www.draftanimalpowernetwork.org](http://www.draftanimalpowernetwork.org), which includes resource lists, events calender and links, the annual NEAPFD event, fall DAPNet Meeting, our online discussion forum [www.draftanimalpower.com](http://www.draftanimalpower.com) and our quarterly newsletter. We invite you to explore these sites, become a member and to attend this summer’s 5th annual NEAPFD in conjunction with the NOFA-Mass Summer Conference in Amherst, MA. This truly remarkable collaborative effort is a tribute to the character of the community we are pulling together. We welcome farmers, foresters, loggers, teamsters, animal owners, homesteaders, conservation organizations, draft animal clubs, and like -minded individuals.

Grab the lines with us, won’t you?

