

H2info

CHENEY LAKE WATERSHED, INC

Citizens Working for Clean Water

Summer 2010

Inside this issue:

Stafford County's New Voice for Water Quality.....	1
Preparing Your CRP Grass for Grazing.....	2
Release of Cropland Report for Upper Mississippi Basin.....	3
Coming Events.....	4

Stafford County's New Voice for Water Quality

By Howard Miller

Meet Brad Johnson, a farmer/rancher from Stafford County and also the newest member of the Citizens Management Committee (CMC).

A Reno County native, Brad moved to the Texas panhandle in 1980. For the next nine years he tilled many acres and ran an intensive cropping operation. In November of 1989, Brad moved his family back to Kansas to settle on his Grandpa's farm. Initially, he patterned his Kansas farm after his Texas operation. Then, 14 years ago, Brad says he realized that he did not want to keep farming like that. He realized that crabgrass was doing real well in his sandy soils, so he set out to find a way to utilize it and other forages to support 40 cow-calf pairs he owns. He chose to let go of all his rented cropland and just kept what belonged to the family. The switch from share rent to cash rent gave him more versatility as to what crop he grows. He mused that crabgrass was hard to figure out with share rent. Today, Brad and his wife, Debbie, operate a purely livestock farm with the help of their 13 year-old son, the youngest of four children and the only one still at home. He custom grazes an additional 40 pairs, mostly on native rangeland. In addition, Brad has over 800 head of hair sheep and 2 "guard" llamas that graze on a crabgrass/rye rotation.



Brad's philosophy is to plant a crop that grows well on the small amount of acres that he grows annual forages. Based on when he has moisture or how much seed costs, Brad may grow oats or BMR sorghum to stockpile some feed for the winter months. Brad uses a grazing rotation to maintain the grass along the banks of the North Fork Ninnescah that traverse across his native pasture for about a half mile near the headwaters of the river. When I ask what he looks at when making management decisions on his farm Brad answers that sustainability is what he strives for. He looks for things that can better his grass while at the same time keeping his costs down. Brad says water is essential to all aspects of his farm from water for his livestock to water to grow the forage for his livestock. He continues, "Water is the most precious resource we have, without it nothing else works, fertilizer can't grow a crop without water. " Brad's desire to stay current on water issues in the Cheney Lake Watershed is what led him to agree to join the CMC. Brad's farm may not seem to have a connection to Cheney Lake, but some 40 miles downstream the river running through his farm becomes an important part of the water supply for over 300,000 people. It's one piece in the puzzle of doing our part in creating better water quality while at the same time growing the food to feed those living in the City. Thanks Brad and welcome aboard the CMC!

H2info is published by the Citizen's Management Committee (CMC) of the Cheney Lake Watershed, Inc. and the Reno County Conservation District with funding provided by a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Section 319 non-point source pollution grant through the Kansas Department of Health and Environment and State Water Plan Funds.

The editor is Chloe Wilson
Cheney Lake Watershed, Inc.
18 E. 7th Avenue
So. Hutchinson, KS 67505
(620) 665-0231

Staff

Lisa French - Project Coordinator
Chloe Wilson - Office Coordinator
Howard Miller - Public Relations Coordinator

Citizen's Management Committee

Sig Collins -Partridge
(620)567-2435
Roland Elpers -Mount Hope
(620)465-3322
Allan Grilliot -Castleton
(620)459-6476
Brad Johnson -Stafford
(620)234-5690
Brent Oatney -Partridge
(620)567-2490
Nathan Stillwell -Arlington
(620)538-3833
Derek Zongker -Plevna
(620)486-2457

Preparing Your CRP Grass for Grazing

By Lisa French

Everybody knows that a good transition to crop production from Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) grass requires advance preparation. In much the same way, the transition from CRP acres to a grazing system can be improved with some planning and preparation.

Evaluate and Plan

The first step is to evaluate what you have. CRP grass varies a lot and you will need to walk at least portions of the field to make a good **evaluation**. This one can't be done from the road at 40 mph.

- A 1200 lb. cow with a 3-month-old calf will eat 36 pounds of forage every day (3% of her body weight). How many pounds of forage can your particular grass stand produce? You need to leave enough for the plant to maintain itself too so don't assume you can use much more than 50% of the forage production. If you want help calculating forage production, contact your extension agent or NRCS office. They can help you decide on an appropriate stocking rate to fit the forage and a plan for timing and intensity of grazing to improve and maintain the grass.
- What's the quality of your stand? Is there a lot of thatch built up? Are there bare spots? Are there any new grass seedlings? Do you have particular weed problems? Are there any legumes present? Each of these can be improved prior to grazing.
- Think about the water and fence ahead of time. These two items are the "bones" of the system. Together they provide the structure for the management that you want. Locate water and cross fences so that cattle will graze the entire pasture, expend little energy walking to water, and distribute manure throughout the pasture. A good system leads to better gains and better grass.

Improve the Stand

Once you have evaluated your grass, you have several things you can do to improve the stand prior to grazing. If your CRP

contract has not yet expired, you will be more limited in your options. Restricted haying and grazing are allowed in the last year of the contract with reduced payments. A spring burn is also allowed. Make sure you contact FSA first for the details.

- If the grass has not been burned or otherwise removed periodically during the contract, you probably have a lot of thatch built up, bare spots, and few new seedlings. You need to open the stand up in one of several ways. You can burn off the old debris if conditions allow exposing the bare soil and allowing seedlings to sprout.
- Haying would be another option for removing some of the old residue although you won't have excellent hay and you still won't be opening up the bare spots to allow for new seedling growth.
- Another good option is "flog grazing" - a method of high intensity grazing in a short period of time. This can also be achieved by using the grass as a calving pasture during the winter. Short periods of intense use will disturb the soil, break up grass clumps, reduce old growth, and improve infiltration. The grass will respond with increased tillering, new seedlings, and more vigorous growth.
- You also might try mowing after August 1st and allow the grass to regrow until fall. Then graze intensively in the fall or winter to remove thatch and disturb the soil.
- For most weeds the problem will be reduced as you improve the grass stands with fire and grazing techniques. Consider management changes before you jump to chemicals that will impact your wallet and kill off some of the desirable forbs. If noxious weeds are present you need to get on the situation with chemical controls before it gets worse.
- If you don't see any legumes in the stand you might want to try to interseed legumes. Legumes improve the grazing system by fixing nitrogen and pulling other nutrients up to the surface from deeper depths. It can be difficult to get forbs started in an established grass stand but not impossible. Seeding after a burn is helpful.

Continued on p 3...

Our Mission:

To provide water quality education and funding for cost effective clean water projects that improve the North Fork Ninescah Watershed which feeds Cheney Lake.

...continued from p 2

Develop the "bones"

Get the hardware in place to support your grazing system - fence and water. Cost share is available for both.

- Watering systems can be funded through the state cost share programs or EQIP. Talk to your NRCS or Conservation District office for details. Generally funds are available for wells and tanks. In some cases solar pumps and ponds are also eligible. If you are in the Cheney Lake Watershed, the City of Wichita will provide additional funds. In some cases, you can get 100% of your costs covered.
- Cross fencing is another item that is eligible for cost share funds through EQIP or the state programs. However, the fence must be "permanent" and the specifications go beyond what is needed in most cases. Usually, one wire of high tensile fence is adequate and easily moved if you need to adjust the fence position. However, if you are interested in more of a fence, you might want to ask about cost share.
- Perimeter fencing is not usually eligible for cost share, but in the Cheney Lake Watershed the City of Wichita will pay 50% of the cost of up to 2 miles of perimeter fence on expired CRP contracts. You need to maintain the grass for 10 years and work up a grazing plan with NRCS.

Hundreds of contracts under the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) in our watershed will expire in 2010 and 2011. Some of the acres will be rebid in the general sign-up scheduled for this summer and some are already being prepared for crop production. Grazing is an economically competitive option especially for marginal ground. To make the most of your grazing system, take the time to plan ahead, get the fence and water in place, and prepare your grass for grazing.



Release of Cropland Report for Upper Mississippi Basin

By Lisa French

On June 16, 2010, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced the release of the Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP) -Cropland report on the effects of conservation practices on cropland in the Upper Mississippi River Basin (UMRB). Studies in Cheney Lake Watershed are a part of CEAP. This is the first in a series of regional reports that continues the tradition within USDA of assessing the status, condition, and trends of natural resources to determine how to improve conservation programs to best meet the Nation's needs. These reports use a sampling and modeling approach to quantify the environmental benefits that farmers and conservation programs are currently providing to society, and explore prospects for attaining additional benefits with further conservation treatment.

Computer modeling simulations indicate that conservation practice use in the UMRB has made good progress toward reducing sediment, nutrient, and pesticide losses from farm fields. However, significant conservation treatment is still needed to reduce nonpoint agricultural sources of pollution.

Major findings from the study that are relevant to the Cheney Watershed are listed below.

- Suites of practices work better than single practices
- Use of soil erosion control practices is widespread, but the most vulnerable acres require additional conservation practices
- Complete and consistent use of nutrient management practices is generally lacking; 62 percent of the acres require additional treatment to reduce the loss of nitrogen or phosphorus from farm fields
- Conservation practices have the greatest effect on the more vulnerable acres

This study is part of a larger effort - the Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP) - to assess the effects of conservation practices on the nation's cropland, grazing lands, wetlands, wildlife and watersheds. CEAP is a multi-agency, multi-resource effort led by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Additional regional cropland studies on the effects of conservation practices will be forthcoming over the next several months.

Key partners in this study were USDA's Agricultural Research Service (ARS) and Texas AgriLife Research, part of the Texas A&M University system. The UMRB covers about 190,000 square miles-121.5 million acres-between north-central Minnesota and the confluence of the Mississippi and Ohio rivers. The basin includes large portions of Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, Wisconsin and small portions of Indiana, Michigan and South Dakota. Nearly half the basin is planted in corn and soybeans.

The complete UMRB cropland study report can be found at www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/nri/ceap.

Reno County Conservation District
 The Water Quality Project Office
 18 E. 7th Avenue
 South Hutchinson, KS 67505-1034

PRSR STD
 U.S. POSTAGE PAID
 PERMIT 54
 HUTCHINSON, KS



ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

All Reno County Conservation District programs and services are provided to anyone regardless of race, sex, color, national origin, ancestry, age or physical or mental handicap.

Coming EVENT!

Summer Field Day—Converting CRP to Grazing

Tuesday, July 27th, 2010

6:30 -8:00 PM

Sig Collins' Pasture
 Intersection of Centennial & Arlington Road

For more information, call the Watershed office at 620-665-0231

"Water is the most critical resource issue of our lifetime and our children's lifetime. The health of our waters is the principal measure of how we live on the land."

- Luna Leopold



Do you want our Newsletter but don't want the clutter? Send me an email at chloe.wilson@ks.nacdnet.net to subscribe to our eNewsletter.