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## Introducing Carmon Unruh

By Howard Miller



Carmon Unruh in her classroom

Meet Carmon Unruh, the newest member of the Citizens Management Committee (CMC) for the Cheney Lake Watershed. Carmon is the third & fourth grade teacher at Partridge Elementary School, where she has taught for 4 of her 15 years as a teacher. You may wonder why a teacher would join the CMC, but Carmon is no ordinary teacher. Carmon is married to Darrin Unruh, a farmer/rancher near Castleton, and they live in Pretty Prairie with their 2 daughters.

Carmon has a real interest in the world around her and for many years she has shared that interest with her students with yearly field trips. Carmon's field trips are literally that, a visit to the field. A field trip in Ms. Unruh's class may be a bike trail ride around Cheney Lake or a visit to the Unruh's pasture along the banks of the North Fork of the Nineschah River. It starts with an interactive teaching style in the classroom where the students learn both in a textbook and in the real world by way of a small garden plot right outside their window at the school. In the small plot, they grow various vegetables, learning about how they grow and what care is needed to grow them. The plot also makes a perfect spot for the students to learn about bugs and other critters that live around plants. Once a year, Carmon takes her students on a day long trip to the field, starting in the pasture, looking at what plants grow there. Next, they move on to the area of trees along the stream, finding pieces of wood to build a small fort. The students get very creative with their fort designing and building. Carmon also uses the river to teach the students about what lives in the stream and how what they do affects the critters and fish that live in the stream.

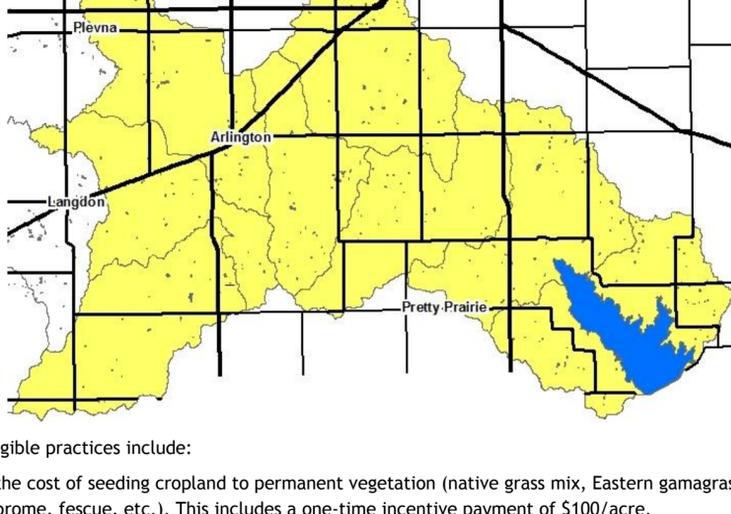


Students in Carmon's class examine a tillage radish.

So now do you understand why Carmon, a teacher, would want to be on the CMC? Carmon is first and foremost a steward of the environment around her and she passes that stewardship on to her students and now, also to fellow landowners and farm operators in the Cheney Lake Watershed.

## Great Cost Share Opportunities!

Cheney Lake Watershed has funding available for conservation practices. Funds may cover up to 100% of the county average cost of a project. The funds must be used within designated priority areas of the Cheney Lake watershed.



Eligible practices include:

- the cost of seeding cropland to permanent vegetation (native grass mix, Eastern gamagrass, brome, fescue, etc.). This includes a one-time incentive payment of \$100/acre.
- terraces and/or grassed waterways
- wetland enhancements
- the relocation of livestock pens from drainage areas or stream sides (fence, water, access roads)
- relocation of winter feeding areas adjacent to streams within pastures (water, feeding pads)
- livestock watering systems that provide an alternative to watering from a stream (tank, solar pump, well)
- other practices that would have a significant impact on water quality. Just ask!

Call us to talk about your ideas for your farm or ranch (620-669-8161 ext. 4). Evenings or weekends you can reach us via cell phone (Lisa 620-200-0172, Howard 620-727-6546).

## Dig A Little, Learn A Lot!

By Lyle Frees, NRCS

SALINA, KS, June 17, 2013—As temperatures go UP, it's an excellent time for farmers, ranchers, and gardeners to focus their attention down to the soil below them. A check-up of your soil's health gives clues of your ground's ability to feed plants, hold water, capture carbon, and more. No fancy equipment required. Just grab a shovel and prepare your senses.

"It doesn't matter what kind of landowner you are, says Natural Resource Specialist Lyle Frees with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). "Small farmers, large farmers, organic farmers, and even home gardeners can all benefit from this simple discovery project of one of their most important resources.

With your shovel, nose, eyes, and hands ready, Frees suggests the following steps to investigate soil health:

**LOOK**—Look for plant residue on the soil surface and a living canopy or cover. The soil structure should look like chocolate cake with air holes permeating throughout. You should see organic matter and live roots that extend way down. And of course, you should see earthworms—our wonderful soil engineers!

**SMELL**—Healthy soil should have the aroma of geosmin, which is a by-product of soil microbes called actinomycetes. Geosmin has a sweet, earthy aroma like nothing else.

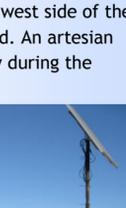
**TOUCH**—Soil should be loose and crumble easily. In healthy soil, roots can grow straight and deep, allowing plants to reach nutrients and water they need to produce the food we love to eat.

"We are blessed with productive soils in Kansas," says Frees. We want to keep them that way and even build them where possible." In addition to the vital production of soil health to the individual farmer or gardener, Frees explains that healthy soil has a direct impact on many larger issues that affect life as we know it. Healthy soil holds, filters, and regulates water; mitigates drought and flooding; reduces runoff and erosion; cycles nutrients; sequesters carbon; and suppresses weeds and pests naturally—all while supporting our homes and buildings. For all these reasons, NRCS has recently launched a nationwide effort to "Unlock the Secrets of the Soil."

Not sure your soil passes the soil health test? Visit the Soil Health portal at [www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/soils/health/](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/soils/health/) or contact your local NRCS office.

Congratulations are in order for Lyle Frees. He retired from NRCS at the end of June. Most recently, Lyle served as a Natural Resource Specialist for the state's NRCS office in Salina. At the Cheney Lake Watershed office, Lyle served as Project Coordinator for over a decade. Before that, Lyle was the District Conservationist at the Reno County Field Office. His vision and stewardship were integral to the development of our project.

## Hats off to Lyle!

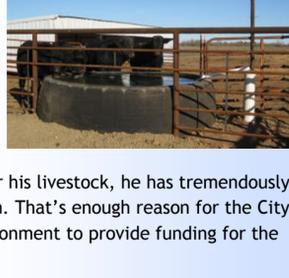


## Watering Systems Popular for Livestock Operations

By Lisa French

Ask Larry Keim what he thinks of his new livestock watering system and you will likely get a big smile. Larry recently installed a new tank and well with a solar powered pump on his land near Castleton. The timing couldn't have been better since the stream on the west side of the property has been dry most of the time since the watering system was installed. An artesian well that provided additional water for the cattle in the past has also gone dry during the drought.

Larry's partnership with Cheney Lake Watershed began with a conversation along the road with Howard Miller and Lisa French. Larry had previously fed and watered his cows next to the stream. A portable shelter and catch pens further concentrated animals in the area. During wet winters, the whole area became boggy and muddy. With encouragement and funding from the watershed, he moved all the facilities including new catch pens to the top of a hill nearly 900 feet from the stream.



Larry's story exemplifies a good project with multiple benefits. Besides creating a more reliable water supply for his livestock, he has tremendously reduced the time that animals spend in or near the stream. That's enough reason for the City of Wichita and the Kansas Department of Health and Environment to provide funding for the project.

Drought conditions across the watershed have created a strong demand for livestock watering systems when ranchers are forced to either leave grass or haul water. By installing alternative watering points, producers will be helping to protect Cheney Reservoir over the long run with reductions in sediment and nutrients floating downstream.

Watering systems also add flexibility to grazing systems and the opportunity for better grass management. Zack and Sig Collins installed three tire tanks with a Bison solar pump in a pasture that is bisected by the Nineschah River. The new watering system allows for cross fencing a large pasture to get optimal use and rest for the grass. Sam Sanders is in the process of extending an existing watering system with a pipeline and tank to provide water for a new seeding of fescue. The tank will be located at the field border adjacent to cropland so that it can also be used when cows are grazing crop residue.

The seasonality of stream flow coupled with poor water quality in stagnant pools or potential health problems from high bacteria levels make watering tanks a more reliable, healthier option. Contact the Cheney Lake Watershed for assistance with planning and funding.

## Watering System & Range Management Field Day



Join us from 6:00 to 8:30 pm on Tuesday, July 30<sup>th</sup>, for a field day and evening meal at the Collins Ranch north of the Nineschah River on Partridge Road. A full meal with bratwurst, hot links, and hamburgers to be served at 6:00 with Thia and Brian Collins' house at 6:00 with a field tour following the meal. The watering system consists of a series of 3 tire tanks and a Bison solar pump. Learn about using construction tires for water tanks and options for solar pumps.

RSVP to our office (620-669-8161, ext. 4) by Monday July 29<sup>th</sup> to help us with the meal count. The ranch is located 1.5 miles south of Arlington Road at 16815 S. Partridge Road.



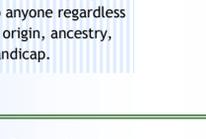
The Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWP) is administering a new program to provide public access to private lands for recreational opportunities. The program, Hunting Access and Conservation Habitat (HACH) is meant to encourage owners and operators of privately-held land to make it available for public hunting. Through the HACH program, landowners receive a large up-front payment in exchange for long term public access. Payments vary by the amount of acres enrolled and the length of contract period. Sign up incentive payments of up to \$150/acre are available for land enrolled in the Continuous Reserve Program (CCRP) and \$30/acre for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Numerous enrollment options are available, contact KDWP wildlife biologist Kyle McDonald at 316-772-2704 to learn more about this program.

## Upcoming Events

- Tuesday, July 30<sup>th</sup>— Watering System Field Day and evening meal at the Collins Ranch, north of the Nineschah River on Partridge Rd—contact the CLW Office for details.
- Wednesday, August 7<sup>th</sup>— Soil Health & Cover Crop Workshop, featuring Ray Archuleta, NRCS Agronomist, and Gail Fuller, Kansas Farmer/Rancher, at McPherson Museum—contact the McPherson Co. Conservation District for details #620-241-1836
- Wednesday, August 7<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup>, No-till on the Plains Points North Bus Tour, seven stops over Nebraska and South Dakota. *Scholarships are available to watershed farmers.* Contact NTOP for event registration #888-330-5142
- Wednesday, August 21<sup>st</sup>—CLW Bus Tour, featuring Robert Bacon (Hutchinson) and Max Tjaden (Clearwater), contact the CLW Office for details.
- Saturday, August 24<sup>th</sup>—K-State Research & Extension Deer Management School, to register contact Cody Barilla at #620-662-2371
- Residue Alliance Bus Tour—September 2013 in Kiowa County. Watch for more information to come.

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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.

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**Our Mission:** To provide water quality education and funding for cost effective clean water projects that improve the North Fork Nineschah Watershed which feeds Cheney Lake.