

Livestock Producer Tour Highlights Best Management Practices

Northeast Kansas—“I consider a tour successful when livestock producers learn from each other,” Roberta Spencer, district manager of the Jackson County Conservation District. She was referring to October 23rd’s livestock producer tour in northeast Kansas. Topics discussed on the tour included: brush and weed control; development of alternative water supply and riparian protection, and funding sources to implement Best Management Practices (BMPs).

According to Spencer, the tour, which featured farms in Jackson, Pottawatomie and Marshall Counties, “was a collaboration between the Pottawatomie County Conservation District, the Kansas Rural Center, and the Jackson County Conservation District.” The tour highlighted BMPs across several watersheds, including the Middle Kansas and the Tuttle Creek WRAPS (Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategy).

Spencer said the idea for the tour surfaced during a conversation with Mary Howell, Clean Water Farms Project field organizer with KRC. She said at that time, the Middle Kansas WRAPS working group was in the middle of developing a plan and outreach activities.

“One of their points of discussion was in educating livestock producers about BMPs by seeing what others within the watershed have implemented and why. The Jackson County Conservation District Board of Supervisors agreed with co-hosting the tour and funding was requested through the Clean Water Systems,” she said.

The tour began on the morning of October 23 at Red Rock Ranch just east of Soldier. While at Red Rock, owners Bill and Debra Brown discussed the improvements made on their farm with the assistance of the Jackson County Conservation District and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The group toured Brown’s native pasture. Brown said he converted the pasture to native grasses due to the rising costs of fertilizer.

The first tour stop was LeRoy Rieschick’s filter strip along Soldier Creek. Rieschick explained the environmental and economical impacts of installing a filter strip. Rieschick installed the filter strip between his crop field and the creek ten years ago. Prior to the installation—when he planted crops in this area—he said he “harvested little-to-nothing because of the tree roots and animals.” Rieschick credits the filter strips to reducing soil erosion on his bottom ground. “We’ve saved tons and tons of soil that would’ve been lost,” he said.

A BMP implemented by Jackson County farmer Dan Pollock was the next stop on the tour. Pollock’s project included fencing a portion of Cross Creek and developing an existing spring as an alternative watering source for his cattle. By implementing this project, Pollock said he is protecting water quality and providing his cattle with an excellent source of drinking water. Pollock said the water from the spring is good water—so much so that his family uses it as their drinking water source!

During lunch at Red Rock Ranch, the group heard from Les Olsen on the benefits of a bale ring feeding pad constructed of fabric, rock and lime. Olsen, who installed a demonstration bale ring

on his farm, said the feeding pad benefits the cattle, protects water quality and makes his job as a cattleman easier.

Carl Jarboe, Jackson County Buffer Coordinator added comments on a feed bunk pad installed as a demonstration in Jackson County as well as a cost comparison of a geo-textile pad versus a concrete pad. He said installation of a geo-textile pad averages \$1.10 per square foot, while installation of a concrete pad averages \$3.17 per square foot.

Will Boyer, K-State Extension watershed specialist, reinforced the issue by referencing how mud effects cattle performance. Boyer also provided a demonstration of an alternative watering site with a water pump powered a solar panel. Even on the cloudy day of the tour, Boyer said there was water being pumped by the system.

Corey Alderson, a wildlife biologist with the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks also spoke on wildlife habitat. He said flash grazing for short periods of time is beneficial to wildlife due to the diversity it provides. Livestock help manage the plant vegetation—especially non-native species—while providing nutrients for native grasses. He also explained incentive programs like Conservation Reserve Program (CRP); a continuous CRP practice titled CP38E; Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP), and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). He said programs like these provide the landowner with incentives to implement practices that impact the soil, water quality and wildlife.

Also during lunch, Mike and Pat Wulf gave a virtual tour of their Potawattomie County farm. The Wulfs converted cropland to grass where their herd of cattle and goats graze. Howell said the Wulfs were selected to be featured on the tour due to the number of BMPs they've implemented on their farm. "We chose to highlight the Wulf's farm, because they've addressed so many livestock issues. They've planted different grasses to extend the calendar and now they are grazing through all four seasons," Howell said.

"In addition the Wulfs developed an alternative water supply throughout the pasture and implemented a rotational grazing system to allow the grass to rest and make it more productive. The water development also allows them to keep the animals out of riparian areas, except for when they occasionally flash graze," she said.

The Wulfs also utilize their own herd of goats for brush control. Mike pointed out during the slideshow that there are few trees with leaves on their lower branches.

The final stop on the tour was at the Marshall County dairy of Joe and Amy Schmitz. The Schmitz family implemented many BMPs on their farm including a redesign of the milking operation to include waste collection and distribution; installation of gutters to reduce lot runoff; household waste system upgrade, and a cedar tree revetment to stabilize a streambank. By implementing the waste containment facility, Joe is able to spread the manure on the fields which allows the crops or grass to utilize the nutrients—all while protecting the water quality in the stream near the dairy.

Amy Schmitz attributed organization of the complex project to the River Friendly Farms Project (RFFP) environmental assessment that Howell assisted the family with through KRC's Clean Water Farms Project. "Doing the notebook allowed us to see all areas that needed attention," Amy said.

"The producers that spoke on the tour were very informative and knowledgeable about the BMPs—such as filter strips, bale ring feeding pads, etc.— that they installed on their land and shared the economical and environmental impact of the practice," Spencer said.

Spencer said she wanted producers attending the tour to consider alternative water supplies for cattle in order to protect riparian areas and improve pasture management. She hopes producers will seek financial assistance through various programs and agencies to implement BMPs on their own farms. Most of the producers highlighted on the tour, in addition to healthy investments from their own pockets, also received a variety of assistance from sources such as Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), State Conservation Commission (SCC) and CWFP.

By attending the tour producers can "learn from each other what works in their operation and what is cost-effective to implement," she said.

According to Howell, "the beauty of these tours is when a livestock producer can see it on someone else's farm—then they can picture how they can make it happen on their place.

"Producers don't have the time or money to implement all ideas—both the good and the bad. Attending a tour allows them to get input from other producers so they don't have to throw all that money at something that isn't going to work," she said.

The tour and lunch were courtesy of the Jackson County Conservation District and an EPA Section 319 grant through the Kansas Department of Health and Environment and State Conservation Commission funding through the Kansas Water Plan.

Source: Connie Pantle, Kansas Rural Center



The Livestock Tour convened at the Red Rock Ranch in Soldier.



*LeRoy Rieschick explains the benefits of his filter strip along Soldier Creek.
Photo by Connie Pantle*



Tour participants had the opportunity to view projects and visit with producers.