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## Water for Grazing System Gives this part-time farmer more freedom

by Julie A. Best  
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The farm operation of Jeff Hendrix in Winston County is very similar to that of many landowners across the state. While Hendrix loves the farm, it is not his primary source of income. By day, Mr. Hendrix is a schoolteacher, and during his free time, he manages a cattle operation. In order to accommodate both professions, he has to make efficient use of his time.

About 10 years ago, Hendrix purchased the farm. He cleared roughly 150 acres and planted Tifton 44 Bermuda grass on approximately 100 acres and fescue on the rest.

Once the pasture was growing, it was time to address the water issues. With assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), he fenced the cattle



**The ball fountains are insulated and fully enclosed.**

out of his pond and from a portion of the stream that flows through his farm. EQIP is a program of the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) that provides assistance to landowners to address quality and quantity issues related to soil, water, air, and other natural resources on their land. Restricting livestock access to the stream and the pond certainly helped with the water quality issue, but now he needed an adequate source of water for the cattle. Given his part-time farmer status, Hendrix needed a reliable source of water and a system that would be relatively maintenance free.

With the technical assistance of NRCS and the options offered, Hendrix devised a watering system that works well for him. He developed a spring to supply water for a concrete trough installed in one pasture. In other pastures, he decided to use the existing pond and a series of water fountains. By placing the water troughs at a site with an elevation lower than the pond, gravity could be used as the power to get the water to the troughs.



**Jeff Hendrix (L) is a schoolteacher by day but enjoys working with his cattle in his free time.**

In the pasture supplied by pond water, Hendrix installed ball water fountains. Rusty Bull, NRCS Soil Conservation Technician, explained, "These fountains were developed in the Midwest. They are fully insulated. If they are installed correctly, they will not freeze." The fountains, which are totally enclosed, have a ball that floats up into an opening. The cattle soon learn to press the ball with their nose, and get a drink of good, fresh water. Bull says, "The secret to the freeze-proof function is that the heat from the earth is channeled through a 6-inch schedule 40 PVC pipe that goes through the concrete pad on which the fountain sits. This pipe contains the supply line and also serves as the 'heat tube.' You would be surprised at the amount of heat that comes through what we call the heat tube."



**The pipe in the pond is connected to a float which keeps the pipe about three feet below the surface of the pond.**

The fountain is connected to a pipe from the pond that has its intake about three feet below the surface of the pond. The pipe is attached to a float that maintains this depth. As the level of the water in the pond raises or lowers, so does the water pipe intake. The "heat tube" associated with the water fountain insures that the water in the tank does not freeze in the winter and the float, which keeps the water pipe about three feet below the surface of the pond, insures that there is always water available for the troughs. Not only is the ball water trough advantageous in the winter, there is also an advantage during summer months. The way the ball trough is designed, the water in the trough stays cool in the summer. In 2000, Hendrix built a second pond and installed more ball fountains. The combination of these technologies seemed to take care of getting the water from the pond to the troughs in an efficient, maintenance-free way.



**The farm pond is beautiful to look at in addition to being good for wildlife, recreation and a source of water for troughs.**

Hendrix says, "I guess the biggest advantage of having the water troughs is that I can do controlled grazing a lot easier." With the installation of the water troughs, Hendrix used strip grazing in the fescue pasture to better manage the available forage. He installed some cross fencing and uses polywire with temporary posts to confine the cattle for short periods of time. "When I'm strip grazing in the winter, I can set up three days of grass for the cattle. I might have to go up there twice a week instead of every day to feed

them," says Hendrix. He estimates that strip grazing the fescue saves him at least three weeks of feeding hay.

As a part of his grazing system, Hendrix drills about 20 acres of ryegrass for winter weekend grazing. "I have two fields of ryegrass, so I put them in one field on Saturday and the other on Sunday. You can't graze the ryegrass all the way down to the ground. You just want to let the cattle graze it down four or five inches and then get them off of it," says Hendrix. By doing that, Hendrix estimates that he saves six months of weekend haying. Hendrix calculates that his feed bill is about half of what it used to be.

Hendrix says, "This past winter was my second winter using the grazing system, and I really saw the advantages of it. I set up two temporary fences in the fescue pasture. When the cattle eat the first strip, I just move the fence beyond the second one. It's no trouble at all; it gives me time to watch the ballgames!"

Hendrix has shown his grazing system to several groups. "Everyone I bring up here is very impressed with the system. It's amazing how quickly the cows acclimated to the water troughs, and the strip grazing works really well," says Hendrix.

Hendrix has plans to install another trough using water supplied from the spring and another ball fountain to the pond supplied system. In addition, he will put in a stream crossing to improve the limited access that the cattle have to the stream.

Busy folks have to use their time wisely, and it appears that Jeff Hendrix has developed a grazing system that does just that for him.

Contact your local USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service office for assistance with establishing a grazing management system.

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