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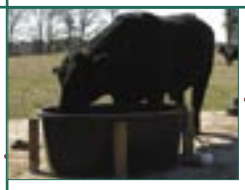
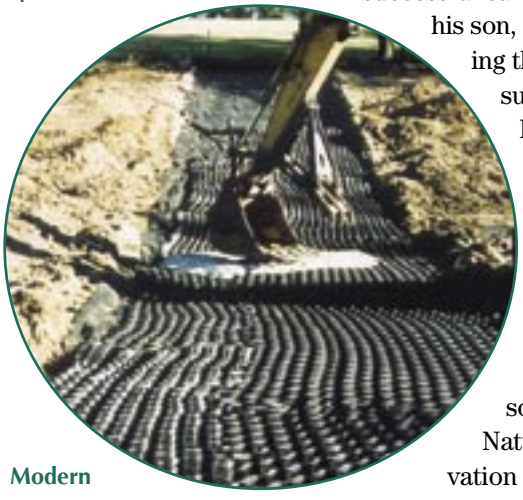


# Cool, clear water

by Julie Best

## This Alabama cattleman put cost-share dollars to work to clean up his stream and get more water to his herd



Modern polyethylene geocell-grid systems are easier and less expensive to install than conventional riprap-constructed stream crossings.

After William Manring returned to his home farm in Covington County, Ala., following a successful career in Florida, he and his son, Frank, began improving the property to make it suitable for raising cattle. But it soon became clear that the small stream running through the farm wouldn't provide enough water during dry weather. William thought building a pond might be the solution, so he contacted his local Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS) field office for assistance.

Although the pond site he had chosen was beautiful, an evaluation showed that the soil would not hold water. As Manring visited with NRCS personnel about other options, the issue of water quality also came up. The Manrings had two common water-related problems: water quantity was inadequate and the quality of the water was being compromised because cattle had unlimited access to the stream. Where the cattle crossed the stream, the banks were badly eroded and animal waste was polluting the water.

NRCS personnel developed a five-year conservation plan that helped Manring clarify his goals and spelled out the practices needed to accomplish them. The answer to the water quantity problem was relatively easy. A series of grazing paddocks with water tanks connected to an existing well with a pipeline now provide adequate water. Each tank sits on a 25-square-foot concrete slab to minimize erosion around it.

To solve the stream-erosion and pollution problems, the plan called for fencing off the stream and installing a 200-foot-long cattle crossing to control livestock access. The crossing was constructed using a 6-inch cellular-confinement geocell system. The system resembles a honeycomb made of rigid polyethylene. The light weight and flexibility of cellular-confined systems make them easier to handle and install than conventional riprap-constructed stream crossings. They are also less expensive, and work well in lower-velocity streams.

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) helped pay for the Manrings' improvements. EQIP is a voluntary program that provides financial and technical assistance to owners who face threats to soil, water, air and other natural resources on their land.

Steve Yelverton, district conservationist for Covington County, says he is continually amazed at how far cost-share funds go. "I like to think of it as seed money," he adds. "In most cases, landowners get enthused about the improvements and do more than they had originally planned to do."

The Manrings were no exception. They planned for three tanks and put in five. William reports that their new grazing-management system is working well. "The cattle have a good water supply, and they're easier to manage," he says. "We've also taken care of the erosion problem they were causing."

For information about cost-share programs that might benefit your farm, contact your local NRCS district conservationist.

*Julie Best is a public affairs specialist for USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service.*