

CONSERVATION *Showcase*



Controlling Erosion Expands Grass Production for Cattle

Roger Edwards loves raising cattle, but he didn't like what was happening on his land. The year was 2004. Gullies were eating up the highly erodible land he was using for pasture. Edwards wanted the erosion stopped. He also wanted more water for his 130 head cow/calf herd and he wanted to make his operation more efficient.

Drew DeLang, district conservationist for USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) was invited to look at the problems. DeLang and Edwards discussed options and came up with a comprehensive plan to address resource concerns. That plan included building paddocks, starting a rotational grazing plan, adding wildlife habitat and building three ponds to stop the gully erosion.



Louisa County Farmer Roger Edwards and NRCS District Conservationist Drew DeLang review Edwards' prescribed grazing conservation plan.

While the plan had many components, they all came together to address Edwards' goals and pressing environmental concerns.

DeLang also suggested Edwards apply for financial assistance under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to help fund the improvements. Edwards agreed and his EQIP application was selected for funding.

The work started three years ago is now almost complete on Edwards' Louisa County farm. In place are three livestock watering ponds, 12,000 feet of interior paddock fencing for 11 paddocks, 2,000 feet of water pipeline water troughs and tanks, and legumes seeded on the Edwards' property. The washed out gullies have started to heal, cattle have more water and better grazing and can graze months longer. Manure is evenly distributed across the land.



Using Environmental Quality Incentives Program financial assistance, Edwards built fences and a cattle watering system that reduces erosion and makes his grazing land more efficient.

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Only 2 acres each of wetland wildlife habitat, tree plantings and timber stand improvements are left to complete the plan this spring. NRCS Grassland Specialist Jess Jackson worked with Edwards and DeLang on the project. He's pleased with the prescribed grazing plan and the results. "The paddock system allows the same number of animals to graze for a longer period of time or for more animals on the same ground. It gives the tasty plants cattle like time to grow back instead of being grazed down to nearly nothing. As the growth rate of forage changes, either speeding up or slowing down, Roger will change the amount of time cattle graze each paddock," said Jackson.

Edwards thinks that, with a little cooperation from the weather, the new paddock system will expand his grazing periods from April/May and September/October to all summer long: a three month increase.

Edwards says he is pleased with the work he's completed. The fencing keeps cattle away from the ponds. Dams have been built across active gullies forming livestock watering ponds and gully erosion has nearly been eliminated. There is increased forage quality, and, he notes, wildlife benefits, too.

"You have to make money farming," said Edwards, "but you need to leave the place better than you found it."

NRCS' DeLang agrees the Edwards land is better for the changes. He estimates erosion has been reduced from seven tons per acre per year to only one or two. "That helps improve soil quality," says DeLang, "and it also helps keep sediment out of our rivers, lakes and streams. This is a winning partnership



NRCS District Conservationist Drew DeLang and farmer Roger Edwards of Columbus Junction check grazing paddocks and watering ponds built with EQIP cost share. The paddocks and ponds help Edwards' cattle operation increase grazing efficiency, lower feed costs and reduce erosion.

between the producer and the tax payers who provide financial assistance through EQIP."

According to Jackson, EQIP funds are available to producers throughout Iowa for prescribed grazing. "Increased grass production is great under the paddock system," Jackson said, "but water is a main consideration. Water needs to be within 600 to 800 feet of the cattle. Sometimes solar water pumps are suggested. Other times putting a pipe through a dam to a trough is the answer, but once the problem of adequate water can be resolved, the design of the system to meet producer objectives is much easier."

For more information about EQIP or grazing, please contact your local NRCS office.

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