

Franklin County Ranchers Save Time, Money with Solar-Powered Well

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Meadville, Miss. — Both Sarah Harvill and Genette Hunt always dreamed of farming. Harvill dreamed of being a cowgirl, and Hunt always wanted to return to her family land in Franklin County and raise cattle.

The co-owners of Sage Farms both realized that dream, now raising 40-plus cows on a hundred acres. “We started with a borrowed bull and three cows,” Harvill said.

They have watched their farm blossom over the years, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has aided in that growth. “We’ve been involved in every program NRCS has to offer,” Hunt said.

Most recently, the Environmental Quality Incentives Programs (EQIP) helped the duo install a solar panel to run their well, which they powered for years with a generator. “We had to pump water every day,” Harvill said. “I went on the Internet and got interested in a solar water system. I started asking NRCS about it.” This year, they got it installed, and talk about a time saver, they said.

The ideal central watering area was not suitable for a pond, and the area was located 1,200 feet from the nearest power source which would have cost more than \$5,000 to connect to the well site. The cattle have been watered by a well and water trough provided through EQIP with the well pump being powered by a generator. The generator used about 7 gallons of fuel a week at a cost of around \$910 a year just for fuel.

Harvill and Hunt had to manually crank the generator at least once and sometimes twice a day to ensure that enough water was pumped into the holding tank to keep the watering trough full throughout the day. This meant that they could not take any extended trips without making special arrangements for the cattle to have water.

Sage Farms was awarded a Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI) Grant which assisted them with purchasing a solar water pump. The pump was easily installed with the existing well and watering system. The pump system requires a very minimal amount of maintenance and

does not have to be attended to on a daily basis. The cost of the pump system was \$2526.00, but the benefits received from the Solar System are priceless, the two say.

Sage Farms is a model farm for NRCS programs. The agency has worked with the farm on hayland plantation, pest management and cross-fencing.

They received the Mississippi Association of Conservation District's Livestock Environmental Stewardship Award in 2011, and they open up their farm to church meetings and agriculture field days often. Their farm will also serve as the site for Franklin County's outreach meeting put on by NRCS this fall. Franklin County, where Harvill and Hunt farm, is one of 52 counties identified by the USDA StrikeForce Initiative.

Both Harvill and Hunt have retired to the farm, and the cows are keeping their operation sustainable. "We have it set up where can live off the cows," Hunt said. When Hunt was a girl, her family live off the land, a process that she emulates now.

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Sarah Harvill (left) and Genette Hunt has used NRCS' help to install a solar panel to run their well and save time and money.