

## Rotational Grazing System Reduces Weeds and Increases Stocking Rates

By: Joanna Pope, NRCS Public Affairs Specialist

Taking a break and having the opportunity to rest is important for a healthy lifestyle. Turns out it is also important for a healthy pasture. That is what a father and son team in Clay County learned when they enrolled their pastureland into the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

EQIP is a voluntary conservation program from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Through EQIP, farmers and ranchers may receive financial and technical help from NRCS to install conservation practices on their land.

Dave and Nathan Jarosik became familiar with EQIP in 2004 when Dave applied for the program at the NRCS office in Clay Center. He was originally interested in using the program to help convert to center pivot irrigation. During that application process he learned that EQIP was also available for pastureland.

Dave ended up enrolling 210 acres of the pastureland he was renting into EQIP. A grazing plan was developed by Katie Lemke, Resource Conservationist at the Clay Center NRCS office.

“The objectives of Dave’s grazing plan are to improve the distribution of livestock in the pasture with water and cross fencing. Our goal is to improve range condition and reduce levels of weedy species,” Lemke said.

The grazing plan included adding a pipeline and watering facility to create an additional water source for the cattle. Cross fence was also installed to divide the 210 acres of pastureland into four smaller pastures. NRCS provided Dave 75% cost-share to install the cross fence, tank and the pipeline.



Joanna Pope, NRCS

*(L-R) Nathan and Dave Jarosik worked with NRCS Resource Conservationist Katie Lemke to develop a grazing plan. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) helped pay for some of the improvements made to the pastureland, like the addition of this well and tank.*

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- Dave Jarosik  
Landowner

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“This was something that I was in the process of doing, but EQIP and NRCS provided me with the information and assistance I needed to make the final product more complete,” Dave said.

Dave had rotated his cattle from pasture to pasture, but not as intensively as his newly-designed grazing system. The EQIP grazing system has cattle moving about every 12 days. This intense rotation forces cattle to graze some of the less-desirable vegetation that may otherwise be untouched.

When cattle are not rotated they can choose to eat the vegetation they prefer most. The preferred species are constantly being eaten down while the less-desirable species are not being grazed. When the less-desirable vegetation isn’t grazed it has a tendency to spread, and can eventually overtake the desired grass species. An intense rotation helps keep the desired grass thick and healthy.

Rotational grazing helped improve Dave’s pasture despite drought conditions. Rotating cattle through the pastures allowed each pasture to rest at least 36 days. This gave the grass time to recover before being grazed again.

Dave’s neighbors were selling off some of their herd to reduce their stocking rates. But with Dave’s new rotational grazing system he was able to keep his herd size up. His son Nathan noticed the cattle were gaining more and producing heavier calves.

Another rotational grazing benefit Nathan noticed was a decrease in flies.

“While fly populations still establish, rotational grazing seems to break their cycle and slow the development of the fly populations,” Nathan said.

Dave and Nathan admit that rotational grazing does take some extra effort. Records need to be kept of the days in each pasture, and cattle are handled more than in a traditional grazing system. Both Jarosiks think a little extra effort is worth the many benefits.

“Some think rotating cows is too much work, but the cows learn pretty quickly to move. They know moving means fresh grass,” Dave said.

Nathan decided to apply for his own EQIP contract this year. He was accepted into the program and qualified for an additional 20% cost-share through the EQIP Beginning Farmer Program.

Nathan’s EQIP contract divided his 140 acre pasture into three smaller pastures. A well was dug to create an additional water source for the cattle. EQIP helped pay for the cross-fence, drilling the well, the well casing, and tank.

“Having this additional source of water has really helped distribute the cows. They used to just hang out down by the spring, and the grass in that area got hit hard. Now that the tank is installed the cows come up here for a drink, and that leads to a more evenly grazed pasture,” Nathan said.

The Jarosiks have been please with their EQIP contracts, and so have their landowners. The landowners have appreciated seeing their land improved and their grass stands protected.

Dave Jarosik put it best, “You better get what you can out of every acre without abusing the ground. The things I learned from NRCS through my EQIP contract have helped me do just that. ♦

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