

Comments from Kansas Technical Committee
Conservation Innovation Grants Subcommittee
Conservation Innovation Grants Grant Applications

Proposal No. 1
Flint Hills Region

Integration of Cover Crops and Mob Grazing into a No-till System

- Supports the implementation of the Upper Neosho/Neosho Headwaters Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategy (WRAPS) 9-Element Watershed Plan
- Outstanding and innovative project. Deserves to be funded.
- Recommend funding. This project aligns with the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).
- This has a strong mix of collaborators, experts.

Proposal No. 2
Solomon Valley

Demonstrating Cactus and Ethnic Vegetable Production in Seasonal High Tunnel Systems to reach Hispanic Farmers and Ranchers

- No ties to organic farming—explanation, soil testing, etc.
- Simply a production oriented proposal

Group Consensus Commentary Sheet

Flint Hills Region

Proposal Name: Integration of Cover Crops and Mob Grazing into a No-till System

Proposal Number: 1 Facilitator: Multiple

Recommendation (circle one): **Outstanding, Recommended, Consider, Not Recommended**

Strengths:

- * Innovative for the Flint Hills area and applicable to crop and livestock producers.
- * Strong and diverse project management team.
- * Good use of cover crop system proposed.
- * Dependent upon land used designation, etc.
- * Not sure what would have made participant ineligible for Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) at this time.
- * Introduces conservation system not normally used in Kansas.
- * Cover crop mix.

Weaknesses:

- * **A minor weakness is the limited number of producers that may adopt the practice in the Flint Hills area.**
- * **Unclear to the benefit to EQIP. (Reviewer's weakness?)**
- * **"but has been denied cost share because Kansas Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) does not recognize grazing of cover crops as legitimate cost share practice." Not a true statement.**
 - **Cover crops are eligible, can be grazed if resource concern is still treated.**
 - **Prescribed grazing is eligible on range, not on cropland because it is secondary use, also no double dipping.**
- * **Irrigation of cover crop.**
- * **Should have a control portion within the 96 acre field.**
- * **Water expense for grazing.**

PROPOSAL No. 1 - Flint Hills Region

Integration of Cover Crops and Mob Grazing into a No-till System

PROJECT ABSTRACT

The Flint Hills Region in Kansas is notorious for its sprawling native rangeland landscapes. Because of these lush grasslands, thousands of cattle are raised each year for the feedlots and meat markets of the country. However, not all the land in the region is grazing land. Much of the river and creek bottoms offer excellent soils for farming. As agriculture has become industrialized there has become a separation of these two sectors of the Ag-economy; farming and ranching. The farm ground raises corn and soybeans for export, ethanol production, food production, or feed grain consumption at the large feedlots. The ranches raise either cows for calf production, or feeder cattle for the feedlots. With this system a great deal of energy is expended in transporting feed grains and cattle around the country, and it has created a number of negative environmental impacts to the state's water resources.

During the grazing season the livestock are well distributed around the regions rich tallgrass prairie pastures. However, the area is composed of primarily warm season grasses, so in the months of November through April these livestock are kept in more concentrated areas. During this period feed is hauled to these concentrated areas in the form of hay and silage. This has resulted in serious water quality issues in streams close to these wintering areas. In addition, the proposed project is above a federal reservoir that is filling with sediment at an alarming rate. One of the proposed solutions in the watershed above the reservoir is the use of no-tillage systems on the cropland.

The cropped fields are sometimes used for grazing crop residue in the non-growing season, but the efficiency of this is poor and this use is not widespread. The cattle do receive some benefit from gleaning the fields, but the crop fields do not benefit from this practice. The use of cover crop production and "mob" grazing can offer a symbiotic relationship where the crop fields and the livestock both benefit. This also reduces energy consumption, and more efficiently distributes the manure generated by the livestock. Research shows "cocktail" mix of various types of cover crop plants can help improve soil quality and keep the ground covered throughout the dormant season.

The participating farmer has been no-tilling his farm for close to twenty years. As he is also a livestock producer he intends to incorporate cover crops into his no-tillage system and then graze these crop fields when cash crops are not being raised. He has applied for EQIP funding through his local NRCS office but has been denied cost-share because Kansas NRCS does not recognize the grazing of cover crops as a legitimate cost-share practice. The proposed project will be used as an information and education site for the region. Soil quality, forage production and quality, as well as livestock health and production will be monitored. There is already an ongoing water quality assessment in the project area so this can also be monitored.

This project will demonstrate that the integration of livestock and cover crop production can offer multiple benefits to the farmer and the environment. In addition, NRCS will hopefully see the benefits generated by grazing cover crops so new guidelines can be written into the technical guides.

Group Consensus Commentary Sheet

Proposal Name: Demonstrating Cactus and Ethnic Vegetable Production in Seasonal High Tunnel Systems to reach Hispanic Farmers and Ranchers

Proposal Number: 2 Facilitator: Multiple

Recommendation (circle one): Outstanding, Recommended, Consider, Not Recommended

Strengths:

Targets Hispanics and beginning farmers.
Innovative.
Not something normally done in this area.
Targets beginning and limited resource farmers.

Weaknesses:

Unclear of the benefit to Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).
Not sure how this would incorporate any changes into EQIP.
Not really anything specific to be added to EQIP.
Protects goals not well defined.
Technical expertise of project staff.
Did not say how much a producer can potentially make or what Nopal cactus sells for.
To get producers to grow Nopal cactus there has to be potential to earn a substantial net profit.

Kansas Component -- Conservation Innovation Grants FY 2011
Solomon Valley RC&D
Demonstrating Cactus and Ethnic Vegetable Production In Seasonal High Tunnel
Systems to reach Hispanic and Beginning Farmers and Ranchers.

One-Page Abstract

The Solomon Valley Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Area, Inc will work in collaboration with a Hispanic Beginning Farmer and Rancher in Scott County and a woman farmer and rancher in Phillips County Kansas to grow and market Nopal cactus and summer vegetables in a seasonal high tunnel system for a period of two years, beginning October 1, 2011. Due to the growing Hispanic population in southwest Kansas and adjacent areas there is great demand for quality ethnic foods. The Nopal cactus is a key nutritional ingredient to many Hispanic recipes.

The seasonal high tunnel system will be used to overwinter the cactus and to grow summer vegetables such as star squash, cilantro, and tomatoes. Cactus not suitable for human consumption can be used for livestock forage. The project goal is to produce at least 2,000 pounds per acre of cactus during each year of production. Each producer will also host a Field Day to help disseminate information to the public regarding the project and CIG. Two training sessions will also be held, one in each county. The trainings will include information on USDA programs, rural sustainability, conservation planning, and Nopal cactus and summer vegetable rotation in a seasonal high tunnel system. At least 30 people are expected at each Field Day and at each training event. Of the 120 people served in the outreach efforts, 20% are expected to be Beginning Farmers and Ranchers, Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers, and Limited Farmers and Ranchers. Each year of the project the Project Coordinator will be responsible for setting appointments and introducing ten Beginning Farmers and Ranchers, Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers, and Limited Farmers and Ranchers to their local NRCS and Conservation District staff and possibly discussing their conservation plan. A bilingual guidebook will also be produced that will be used to assist individuals and groups in the completion of Kansas CIG applications. During the course of the grant period the RC&D will present the project at at least one NRCS event.