



Taylor County

Planning is Key to Grazer's Success

Background

Brian Bolstad, along with his wife, two sons, and daughter, operate a dairy farm Northwest of Gilman, Wis., in Taylor County. The Bolstad family utilizes managed grazing for feeding approximately 80 dairy cattle throughout the growing season along with a herd of replacement heifers.

Program Successes

The Bolstad property consists mainly of somewhat poorly draining soils. The Almena Series is a good soil for growing forage, but does not lend itself to cattle traffic without a raised and surfaced lane. With difficult soils, broken down fences, very abundant rainfall, and poor drainage, the value of managed grazing had diminished on the Bolstad farm. Cattle had difficulty, and suffered foot and leg injuries, traveling through 12 inches or more of mud.

In the summer of 2014, technicians from the Taylor County Local Conservation District (LCD) and NRCS office met with the Bolstad family to develop a design to improve cattle access to the pasture area. The first step was to survey the entire area and come up with a design to address the resources concerns near the farmstead. The concerns included poor access to the manure storage structure, poor drainage near the barn, very deep mud where the cows would gather near the barn, and the general mud problem of 80 cows heading out to pasture twice a day during a wet summer. The mud was so prevalent, Brian stated that a disturbing number of cows went lame and could not head out to pasture to graze.

NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program assistance enabled Brian to add an access road with geotextile, graded rock, gravel and a culvert to aid in getting to the manure storage structure. The installation of a 130-foot concrete walkway decreased mud near the barn. The installation of approximately 800 feet of grassed waterway allowed clean water from the farmstead area to flow in an orderly and proficient



The Bolstad lane for cattle traffic before technical assistance. The lane after design and construction.

manner. An additional culvert carried water under the walkway and kept cows high and dry. In addition, over 2,130 feet of raised and surfaced walkways and 6 culverts were constructed to allow dairy cows access to the entire 80 acres of pasture.

In 2015, single wire fences were installed along the lanes and at the paddock edges. Multi-strand fencing was installed around the 80-acre perimeter. All fencing was installed by the Bolstad family and met NRCS standards and specifications.

Thanks to financial and technical assistance by NRCS and the Taylor County LCD, a lot of hard work by the Bolstad family and a good earthmoving contractor, the Bolstad cows can now access any part of their pasture, thereby ensuring a good distribution of grazing and more than enough forage for the cows according to the Bolstad's intensively managed grazing plan.

In a recent discussion with Brian, two of the biggest improvements he noticed with the dairy cows were cleaner udders, which translates to a lower somatic cell count, and a large reduction in hoof problems. Wis. Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection was also a cost-share partner.