

# Crawford County Success from the Field

## New Farmer Owners Make Big Changes

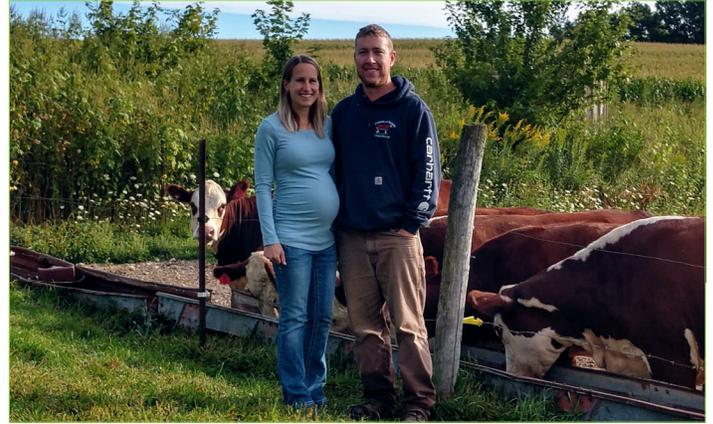
### Background

Jake and Marcie Connelly, of Soldiers Grove, have been around farming their entire lives, but the couple's lives began a new chapter when they purchased their first farm last year. Prior to purchasing their 80-acre organic farm, the couple produced a mix of conventional crops and hay on land they rented for nearly a decade. With a piece of land they could finally call their own, the conservation minded couple began looking into sustainable ways to increase the productivity of their farm.

### Program Successes

With a mix of cropland and pasture at their hands, one of the first opportunities the couple sought was establishing a rotational grazing system on their farm. "Conservation is important so that the land remains in the same, if not better, condition for future generations," said Jake, "We wanted to begin prescribed grazing to improve the soil and pasture health, and therefore create a healthier herd of cattle." Jake approached NRCS in the fall of 2018 looking for assistance on ways to improve 30 acres of pasture suffering from low production and invasive brush. The couple were put in touch with Dennis Rooney, grazing specialist with Southwest Badger RC&D, to assess their pasture and develop a grazing plan that would help meet their needs. This plan included Natural Resources Conservation Service cost share through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to implement various practices and make improvements to the pasture, as well as convert roughly eight acres of marginal cropland to pasture to help the pair begin rotationally grazing Hereford beef.

With word that their EQIP plan was funded in the spring of 2019, Jake began making preparations to complete his improvements. As soon as conditions allowed, Jake began working on brush management to reclaim nearly five acres of pasture previously consumed by multiflora rose and honeysuckle. Then, forage and biomass seedings were completed on the cropland and existing pastures with a mix of grasses and legumes designed to improve the forage quality. With what free time was left, Jake and Marcie were out setting posts to build



Jacob and Marcie Connelly on the farm near Soldiers Grove, Wisconsin.

the two miles of fence needed to establish their paddocks and make their rotation grazing system more efficient.

The couple have noticed some improvements to the pasture from the efforts they have put forth already. In comparison to the first year on their farm, the pastures have remained greener throughout the summer with no shortage of forage through the dryer parts of summer. With more forage available, Jake anticipates being able to feed their cattle on the pasture longer into the year before having to supplement with hay, which will be a big cost saver for the couple.

### Future Plans

Over the next year Jake and Marcie plan to complete the remainder of their fence and add livestock pipeline and watering facilities throughout their paddocks. Once their plan is complete, the couple hopes to do more intensive grazing and see the full benefits of rotational grazing. The couple's experience with NRCS has been positive so far. Jake plans to use the EQIP program again to begin utilizing cover crops on the cropland he farms and work with NRCS to establish contour strips in the 2020. With the changes that he is making, Jake hopes to minimize his soil loss and reduce nutrient runoff from the land he farms by being a better steward of the land.

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