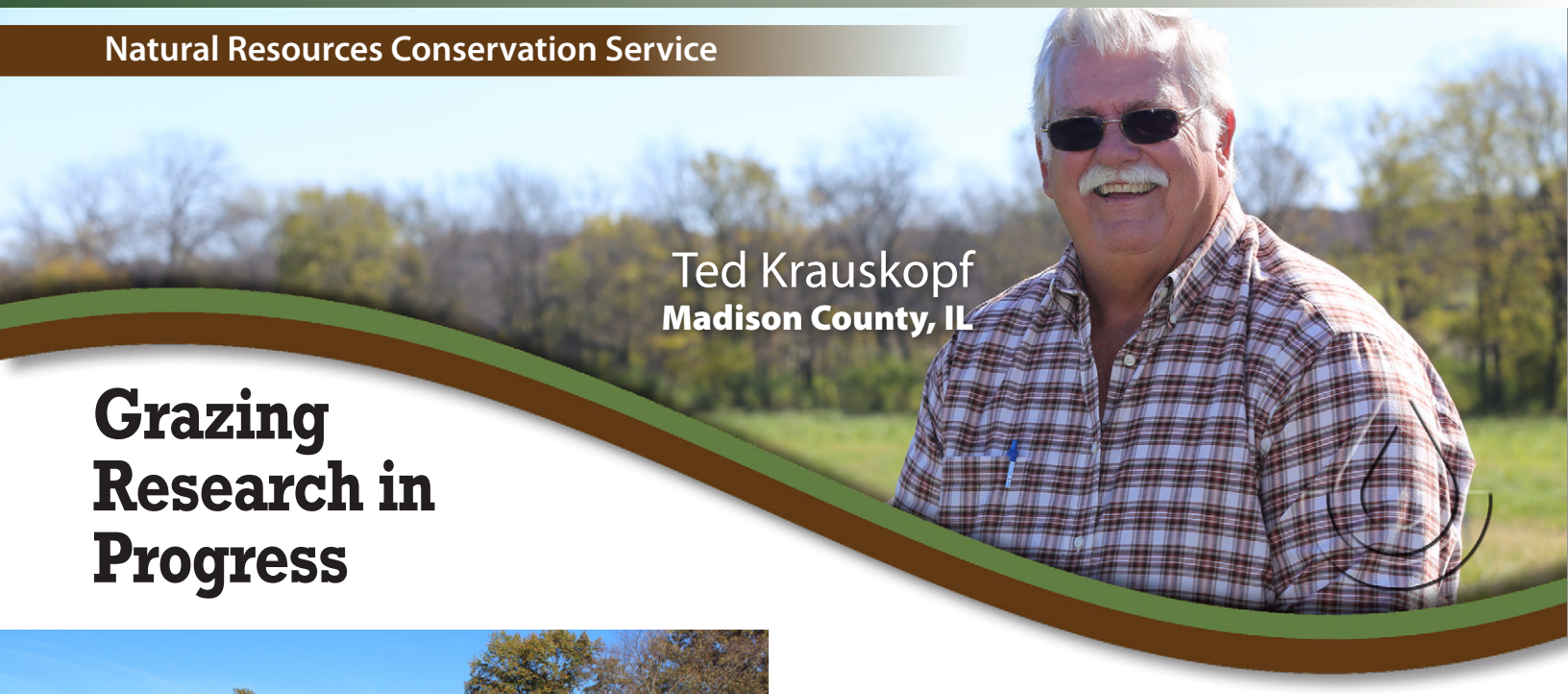
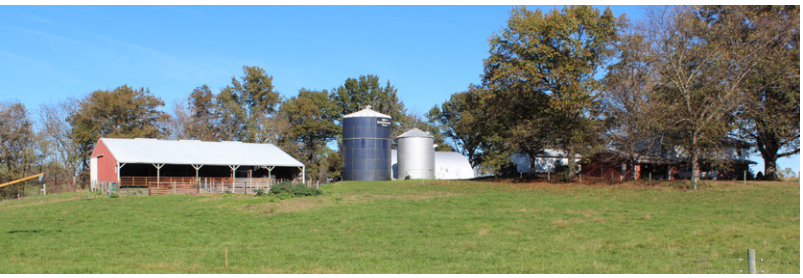
USDA United States Department of Agriculture

Natural Resources Conservation Service



Ted Krauskopf
Madison County, IL

Grazing Research in Progress



Ted and Linda Krauskopf have 200 acres of land near Highland, Illinois. 130 acres are tillable and many acres are lined with woods. Ted used to grow row crops--corn, soybeans, and wheat—but in 2007, Ted decided he was done growing commodity crops on the home farm. He took all his sloping ground and planted it to a grass/legume mixture and annual forage crops for grazing livestock. Ted uses minimum tillage when planting annuals and cover crops, and no-tills whenever he can. He even sold his hay equipment to reduce the frequency of baling hay from the pasture. Not owning the equipment forces him to make a more deliberate decision to bale hay.

Ted now runs a mixed herd of Registered Red Angus and some crossbred commercial cows. He is a cooperator with a seed stock producer and his registered calves are sold back after weaning. Calves from the commercial cows are sold after some backgrounding, or retained for grass finishing. He has about 40 cows on 90 acres of pasture and he is more than happy with his decision and his land's condition. He placed the balance of the farm into a permanent conservation easement.

In 2008, he signed an NRCS contract for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). EQIP helped address onsite resource concerns: develop a grazing plan, build perimeter fence, install an access road, build a winter feeding station, establish paddock division fences, and supply paddocks with water.

Ted has done just about all he can to halt erosion on rolling southern Illinois land, but he's not finished. Ted continues to investigate and learn new ways to improve soil health and build more organic matter.

Krauskopf's operation uses eleven permanently seeded grass/legume paddocks filled with tall fescue, Orchardgrass, and legumes, (both) red and white clovers. Ted rotates summer and winter annuals with cover crops, through three additional fields he strip grazes. These fields are forage mixes his cows love to eat. He also plants a variety of different cover crop mixes to improve soil health and optimize the nutrient value of all grass and forage grown. He subdivides paddocks even farther as he strip grazes most of his forages.

Ted used NRCS' EQIP program to create a top-notch grazing system, but he's continually modifying his plan with innovative ideas and new techniques that improve sustainability and further decrease inputs and operating costs.

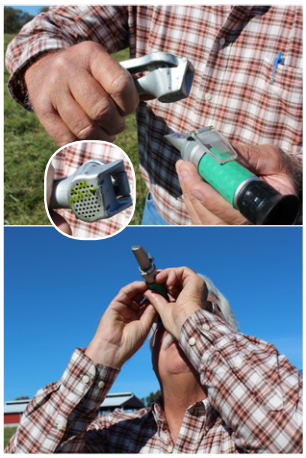
Ted's farm is an Illinois demonstration site for "The Pasture Project." Their goal is to support healthy rivers, rich soils, and abundant wildlife in the upper Mississippi River Basin by expanding use of adaptive grazing methods. The project involves Warren King with The Wallace Foundation, Dr. Allen

Williams, NRCS, and the Illinois Grassland Conservation Initiative (GLCI). The project tests new grazing techniques such as Ultra High Stock Density Grazing, and uses high tech tools and equipment to learn how livestock operators can better manage soil, grass, and livestock and what benefits can be confirmed. Ted and all parties involved in the pilot are excited about what they've learned so far.

On one paddock, Krauskopf grows a 15-species cover crop mix and on another, he's seeded a turnip-radish hybrid along with Sudan grass for summer grazing. Ted plants cereal rye, turnips and radishes for winter grazing. His herd will graze that paddock in January 2017. He uses rotational grazing, but uses and experiments with several other options—high stock density grazing, or mob grazing, in addition to routine strip grazing. He's seen benefits using each technique—benefits to the herd, the forage, and the soil. "If you do it right, it's a win-win-win!"

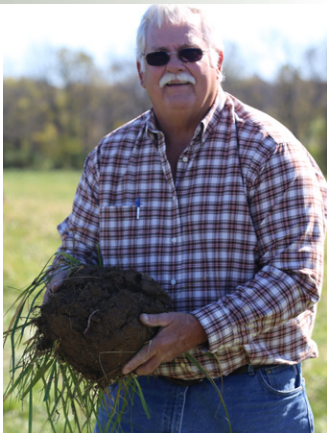
Ted Krauskopf has a regular day job, so he manages his grass and herds all other hours of the day. As busy as he is, Ted is well-read, in constant pursuit of research. He gathers field data and conducts experiments and trials using new technology. His ongoing search for new information, for better ways of doing things, and documenting changes and improvements are Ted's true passion.

Ted strives to build diversity into every aspect of his operation. He values diversity with livestock, good grazing management, cover crop species, and within the soil--its microbes, bacteria, and biology of life that lies deep among the roots of the grass and vegetation he tends. "I'm convinced of one thing: the more I leave things alone, the more things take care of themselves."



Ted keeps a close eye on his soil and performs soil tests every three to four years. He tracks soil fertility levels in the fall. One of the 'hot' tools he uses daily is a Refractometer. With it, he grabs a small handful of grass, wads it up into a small ball, and then squeezes out the bright green 'juice' using his wife's old garlic press. The juice is placed on the tool's glass monitor and viewed in bright sunlight for a photosynthetic or, BRIX reading, of the grass's nutritional value for the herd. This is an up-to-the-minute, real-time forage test he can perform any time, any day. This tool will no doubt be a commonplace item for all graziers someday.

As an active member of Madison County's Soil and Water Conservation District Board for eight years, Ted is familiar with environmental issues facing Ag production. For years, he's reduced inputs on his operation, partly to reduce costs, but also to create a microenvironment on his land that holds on to both inputs and outputs better. He effectively generates and uses needed nutrients within his own operation.



Weed control on his operation is not needed. "Weeds are less and less common here. In fact, I call weeds forage. The cows eat them!" As for parasite control and pest management issues, Ted opts for natural techniques here as well. "I'm beginning to see increasing populations of dung beetles in my pastures. That's one of nature's built-in control devices. I'm totally in to using it all I can to keep my cows and calves healthy and comfortable."

"Nutrients don't run off this land. Sediment stays where it's at. My soils are healthy and absorb a good rain like nothing I've ever seen." When asked which aspect of his farm is most important—his cows, his grass, or his soil—Ted bites his lower lip. "To me, they are equally important. And they are all connected." With so much learned, and so much to share, Ted enjoys having other farmers, graziers, and livestock producers visit his farm so they can see what he's doing.

Ted only frost seeds legumes and clovers in February. He uses a four-wheeler and electric seeder. He's extra careful with the clover, because he's had clover take over too much in some pastures. When it's time to stockpile for winter, Ted typically begins in late July or early August. "When grass growth is good, we can take it and use it any time. I've grazed some stockpiled grass with my herds in October and November while its nutritional value is still very high."

The watering system includes nine hydrants and three troughs. Because his farm was without a strong well, it made sense to tap the lines into the city water. "It's a sizable bill to pay every month, but we get healthy calves with that good, clean water. It's worth it to me."

For Ted, use of prescribed burns and brush management is not a concern. Although he does clip down some brush areas once in the summer if needed.

Ted recently signed up in NRCS's Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), which offers opportunities to try new solutions and to hold events and public meetings. "I'm optimistic about where grazing and agriculture is going as far as soil health, water quality improvements, and a commitment to conservation. I'm glad to be part of this trend and want to open the eyes and minds of other landowners if I can."