



PROFILES IN soil health

Kruer Family Farm
Campbellsburg, Indiana
60 acres

Crops: Pasture

Planting and Cover: Annual Rye Grass, Hairy Vetch, Red Clover, Orchardgrass, Timothy



Times Are A Changin'

Life is all about change. And if there is one family that knows this all too well, it's the Kruer family.

Originally from Floyd County, Tom Kruer and his wife Libby acquired a 42 acre intensively tilled, row-crop farm in western Washington County in 1973. At the time, only 15 acres of the land was in permanent pasture. Several years later, the Kruers purchased an additional 18 acres of land which included more row crop, hay and woodlands.

During his first 15 years on the land, Tom farmed the only way he was taught – just like his father. This meant buying used equipment, using chemicals and working the ground a little too hard.

"We sprayed anything and everything for whatever," said Kruer. "That's what dad was taught and that's all he knew."

Throughout the years the Kruers converted their row-cropped farm to permanent pasture and raised a variety of animals including cows, sheep and goats. When the

last goat passed, they decided to stick solely to a cattle operation, raising about 30 head.

After a tragic farm accident took his father's life in 1989, Tom had a change in heart in how he managed his operation. He knew there was something different out there to make his farming methods better for Mother Earth.

"I knew how we fed our cows and how we took care of our land. For me, to be able to see that and to know there had to be a better way was eye-opening," Kruer said. "Change is hard for people. Change is hard for me. But we felt it was necessary for us to do."

Over time Kruer read a lot about pasture management and one particular concept stuck in his mind.

"There are four things in nature that are all connected – the soil, the plants that are in the soil, the animals that eat the plants and the people that eat the animals," he said. "How we treat the soil ultimately affects how we treat ourselves."

Tom started changing his operation by introducing a



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Kruer Family Farms, Indiana

rotational grazing system. He divided his land into 70 paddocks, putting his livestock in a smaller space for a short period of time then moving them to another area to allow the pasture to rest and recover.

When getting water to his animals became an issue, he worked with the United States Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) staff to develop a conservation plan which included both a watering system and exterior fencing. Tom moves his cows at least once a day and sometimes up to three times per day if the grass is growing quickly. Any critical areas that may be affected by erosion are quickly addressed and seeded.

"My goal for 2016 is to give the paddocks a minimum of 30 days to recover before my cattle are reintroduced to the area," said Kruer.

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-Tom Kruer, Landowner

By utilizing these smaller paddocks, Tom was also able to change the way he fertilized his land. Concentrating animals into smaller paddocks resulted in manure piles closer together and more evenly distributed. Because manure serves as natural fertilizer that helps feed the soil, improves fertility and adds to the microbial community found in the pasture and in the soil, Tom has completely eliminated the use of commercial fertilizer from his pastures while at the same time increasing his forage production and managing the manure more efficiently.

Tom's final change to his farming practices came in 2010, when he decreased his herd size by a third because of droughty weather that hit the area. Reducing his stocking rate allowed his forages to grow taller and rest longer, producing deeper roots which in turn provided more drought resistance, more efficient use of soil nutrients, and better feeding of soil biology. Likewise, the longer rest periods keep the ground covered more days and allow a deeper mulch to build on the soil surface which keeps the



Victor Shelton, Indiana NRCS State Agronomist discusses pasture management practices with Tom Kruer.

soil cooler in the summer and warmer in the winter and prevents weeds from germinating and taking over the pasture.

Kruer has since refined his paddocks, reducing the number to 65, to help with uniform grazing and the ability for him to access the paddocks with equipment to aid in manure distribution.

When asked what his ultimate goal for his farm was Kruer responded "My goal is to make this farm better than when it was when I got it. Right now I think we've done that."

To learn more about improving your soil's health, visit http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/in/home/?cid=nrcs144p2_031079.

To learn more about developing a conservation plan for your farm or Farm Bill Programs available, stop by your local USDA Service Center (<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/in/contact/local/>).

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