

CWF FARMER PROFILE: Craig & Carol Blocksome

Ness County

Dry Bazine Creek Upper Arkansas River Watershed

By Connie Pantle

Ransom, Kansas—Ness County wheat farmer Craig Blocksome was motivated to make changes on his 1,360 acre farm after completing the River Friendly Farm Plan (RFFP) environmental self-assessment through the Kansas Rural Center.

While completing the RFFP assessment was initially his wife Carol's idea, Craig said he knew there were environmental issues on his farm that needed addressing. The RFFP helped bring those issues to the forefront. Specifically, two waste containment tanks, one buried and one above ground, left from the hog operation which ceased in the mid-nineties.

To offset some of the cost of the removal, the Blocksomes sought cost-share through KRC's Clean Water Farms Project (CWFP). Field Organizer Troy Schroeder assisted the Blocksomes by completing the RFFP, applying for cost-share and establishing a work plan and timeline to remove the tanks.

Craig said he knew removal of the tanks needed to get done. "I was concerned the tanks were a safety hazard, as well as being an environmental problem."

However since the Blocksomes no longer had hogs, it was hard for Craig to financially justify the removal of the tanks, he explained. "Without the income from the hogs, I didn't have an incentive any longer." In spite of this, the prospect of cost-share "prompted us to do it," he said.

When the tanks were abandoned there was some manure left in them, which was a concern for Craig.



Craig Blocksome, Ransom, and Clean Water Farms Field Organizer Troy Schroeder, discuss the above ground tank that held livestock waste from the Blocksome's former hog operation. With CWFP cost-share, Blocksome removed the tank as well as a below ground tank and recycled them.

Photo by Carol Blocksome

Water Quality Concerns:

- Unused livestock waste tanks
- Unplugged abandoned wells
- Anti-siphon device on sprayer tank hose to prevent contamination of well

Best Management Practices Implemented:

- Removal and disposal of abandoned livestock waste tanks
- Plugged three abandoned wells to prevent contamination from runoff
- Installed an anti-siphon device on sprayer to reduce contamination of the well and aquifer

“Anytime you have something like that, eventually it’ll rust down and manure may leech out into the soil,” Craig said. The Blocksomes were concerned that the contamination, if it occurred, could reach the water table or Bazine Dry Creek which runs through the farm. “The waste tanks posed a continued water quality threat if leaks were to develop over time and allow waste into the water table,” Troy said.

To ensure that the soil under and around each tank was not affected by manure, which is typically loaded with nitrates, soil testing was done this spring. “Soil testing was done at each tank site to confirm that no significant leakage had occurred,” Troy said. “Soil tests were well within tolerance so no soil treatment was necessary.”

Craig then scraped the area around each of the tanks and backfilled the hole caused by the removal of the buried tank. Grass seed was sown into the bare areas to stabilize the soil and reduce erosion from runoff. After removing the tanks, he extracted the remaining manure and spread it on his crop ground. Craig then cut each tank into pieces and took it to the salvage yard to be recycled as scrap steel.

While completing the project, Craig said the biggest obstacle was getting the buried tank out of the 14’ hole. He said the removal took several attempts. “I ended up putting a lot of time in on this deal,” he said. After using a backhoe to dig around the tank, a ramp was built out of the hole. Craig and a neighbor attempted to roll the tank out of the hole using a tractor. After several failed attempts, eventually the neighbor’s Steiger four-wheel drive tractor and a substantial tow rope (normally used to tie submarines to the dock) succeeded in getting the tank out of the ground.

Troy said that when “working through the RFFP assessment, producers almost always discover some things to improve their operation or protect water quality. For the Blocksomes three unplugged wells stood out as well as the method in which they fill the sprayer. Therefore, they plugged the three wells upon prompting from the environmental self-assessment. “Plugging abandoned wells is one of the easiest water quality protection practices to complete, but a very important and effective one,” Troy said.

Craig said they also “came up with a better system



BEFORE (top): Craig Blocksome inspects the abandoned livestock waste tank buried on his Ness County farm. **AFTER (bottom):** After the tank was removed and recycled, the site of the former tank has now been seeded to grass.

Photos by Carol Blocksome

for filling the sprayer” including an anti-siphon device for the sprayer tank hose. “An anti-siphon device on the well, for example, is a small addition that will prevent chemical from siphoning back into the well (and aquifer) while filling a sprayer,” Troy elaborated.

Overall, by making these changes on their farm, the Blocksomes hope to help protect water quality on their farm and downstream.