

CWF FARMER PROFILE:

John Geiger

Brown County

Wolf Creek Missouri River WRAPS

By **Connie Pantle**

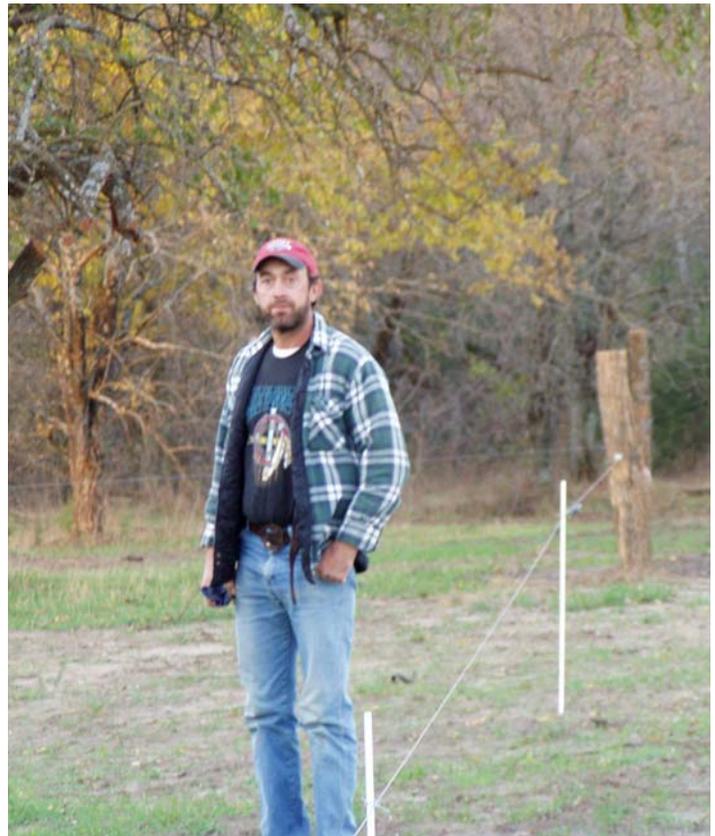
Robinson, Kansas—John Geiger always dreamed of having his own pond with a floating dock—somewhere his children could swim and where he could have picnics and campouts. Because of conservation practices on his farm that dream has come true for the Brown County livestock producer.

The initial purpose of the pond was to supply water for Geiger's 20 cow herd, however because of the water quality practices that Geiger also implemented, the recreational aspect was an added benefit.

After purchasing a 68-acre pasture a few years ago, Geiger said he had his work cut out for him. In order to prioritize the work needed on the Brown County pasture, Geiger completed the River Friendly Farm Project (RFFP) environmental self-assessment.

Ed Reznicek, a field organizer with the Kansas Rural Center's Clean Water Farms Project (CWF) assisted Geiger in completing RFFP assessment. Joining Geiger for an evening session working on the notebook were his brother and a friend, who completed assessments of their own farms.

The buddy approach, or working with a friend or family member, according to Reznicek, can be a rewarding way to approach the environmental assessment and whole farm planning. "We started on the notebook late afternoon, took a short break for supper, and then finished the notebooks that same evening. It took a total of about four hours," stated Reznicek. "Plus, we had some stimulating discussion



John Geiger, Brown County farmer, built a small pond to serve as a water source for his cattle herd.. He installed a tank below the pond and fenced the pond to exclude the cattle.

Photo by Ed Reznicek

Water Quality Concerns:

- Quality of water associated with livestock waste entering the creek
- Alternative watering points for pasture
- Grassland management to improve grazing and manure distribution

Best Management Practices Implemented:

- Installed a new pond as a water source
- Installed an alternative water supply—a tank below the pond
- Fenced pond using permanent high tensile fence (with a solar power source) to exclude cattle

on issues brought up in going through the notebook.”

Geiger likes to think of the health of the watershed as a whole with the quantity and quality of water as the focus. “Water is life. Without it we wouldn’t be here.”

Despite Geiger’s pre-existing awareness of conservation practices and water quality, the notebook caused him to think of it in terms relative to his own operation. He said the figures and numbers of his own situation gave him insight. “It causes you to reassess your own situation—and find something you may not have thought of,” he said.

The top three priorities the RFFP notebook highlighted for Geiger included: water quality related to livestock entering the creek; the need for alternative watering sources in the pasture, and grassland management to improve grazing and manure.

Geiger determined the solution to his need for a water source was to build a small pond (under one acre) and install a waterer below the pond’s dam. This would eliminate the need for the cattle to use the small creek as a drinking water source.

The creek drains into a tributary of the Wolf River. In addition to eroding the creek banks, the cattle also deposit manure into the creek while drinking.

To offset some of the costs involved in installing an alternative water source and fencing the pond, Geiger applied for and received cost-share through KRC’s CWF-RFFP. Geiger said the initial purpose of the pond is “to retain water and create a water source for cattle.”

“The pond grabs that water and releases it slowly to reduce erosion,” he said.

After construction of the small pond, Geiger installed a concrete waterer below the pond dam. Geiger said Reznicek suggested the waterer—a 200 gallon concrete tank partially buried in the pond’s dam. “It is a better long-term option—it will be here for years to come,” Geiger said.

Using a permanent high tensile wire electric fence, powered by a solar panel and battery, John excluded



Above: Because of the high quality of water in the pond, it now serves as a recreational destination for John’s family. (Below): Ed Reznicek, CWFP field organizer with KRC, suggested John install this type of concrete waterer for his cattle.

Photos by Connie Pantle

the cattle from the pond to reduce erosion as well as bacteria contributed from the cattle. He planted grass along the banks of the pond and plans to flash graze the pond area “to get the grass knocked down and allow the cattle to spread the seed” he said. According to Reznicek, this allows the cattle to utilize and maintain the forage.

Geiger emphasized the importance of adequate grass around a pond. “Grass filter strips above the pond filter the water from a rain event, before the water reaches the pond,” he said. “It is important to have grass to catch all those nutrients from the chemicals and manure.”

Another issue in Geiger's pasture is brush control. Cedars and hedge trees were allowed to invade the pasture and choke the grass. In the areas where Geiger cleared the invasive trees, he sees signs of native grass returning. "I love seeing the natives," he said, pointing out side oats grama, little bluestem, lespe-deza and wild flowers. "It is a good sign to see native grasses," he said.

With the return of the native species, Geiger is encouraged by the variety returning to the pasture. "Biodiversity is the key salad bar pasture," he explained, referring to the theory that a cattle's diet should consist of a variety of ample grasses, forbs, and legumes. "The cattle have more choices," he said.

To encourage additional biodiversity, Geiger plans to sub-divide the pasture into three paddocks. He will follow a management plan and move his herd into a new paddock once a week. Geiger explained this is a realistic goal for an operation the size of his.

In addition to the diversity of plant species, Geiger observed a variety of wildlife in his pasture including bobcat, deer, turkey, rabbits and coyotes. To encourage diversity, Geiger said he will leave some of the timber as a "native area" instead of clearing the pasture entirely. "I like trees—I'll leave a little of it wild," he said.

While Geiger admits he has his work cut out for him, he's encouraged by the progress he's made so far. And an occasional trip to the pond reminds him of the importance of water quality on his farm. "Seeing the kids jump in and swim makes it all worth it," he said.

The Clean Water Farms –River Friendly Farms Project (CWF-RFFP) is coordinated by the Kansas Rural Center, administered by the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, and funded by U.S. EPA Non-point Source Section 319 Program funds.



Above: The pond site before John built the pond. In addition to building the pond, John cleared many cedar trees from the pasture. **Below:** John's one acre pond, which serves as a water source for his cattle herd.

Photos by Ed Reznicek