

## CWF FARMER PROFILE:

# Cheri Karns

## Jackson County

### Elk Creek Delaware River WRAPS

By **Connie Pantle**

*Holton, Kan.*—Cheri Karns overlooks her Jackson County farm and says “How can you not love it?” It is this love for her farm that has driven Karns and her partner, Luke Emmert, to make changes to protect the farm from erosion and improve water quality.

Karns said she has seen changes on the farm since purchasing it in the mid-1970s. According to Cheri erosion has changed the way the farm looks in many places. “There are culverts that have washed out and places we used to drive across that are longer there.”

According to Karns, she works hard to have something to give her children. “I want to preserve what is here,” she said. She said her two daughters understand that. “It doesn’t stop with me,” she said.

A hand-painted journal records her day-to-day experiences on her farm—including her efforts to improve its water quality. Emmert tells her that the journal details her legacy to her children and grandchildren. She said the journal will show her daughters what it takes to preserve a place like theirs.

A look around the farm and Karns’ tenacity in fighting erosion and protecting water quality is evident. “If something doesn’t work...come up with another plan,” she said. And she wants to pass that knowledge and dedication on to her children. “We’ve made changes and I’ve let the kids know what worked and what didn’t work,” she said.

As a landowner, Karns wanted to develop a pasture that allows the tenant the ability to manage the land



*Jackson County landowner Cheri Karns installed alternative watering points in her pasture, allowing pond and stream protection as well as the ability to divide the pasture into a rotational grazing system.*

*Photo by Connie Pantle*

### **Water Quality Concerns:**

- Livestock waste entering the creek and pond
- Soil erosion caused by cattle trailing down to the creek and pond

### **Best Management Practices Implemented:**

- Installed cross fencing to implement rotational grazing system
- Restricted cattle access to ponds, stream
- Installed alternative watering points for cattle

and his cattle as sustainably as possible. Karns said implementing the process was well thought out and planned. “We didn’t jump,” she said.

According to Karns, Emmert urged her to complete the River Friendly Farm Project environmental assessment tool through the Kansas Rural Center. Working with Clean Water Farms Project (CWFP) Field Organizer Ed Reznicek, Karns completed the RFFP notebook.

Karns said the self-assessment made her think about where the water goes after leaving her farm. “I didn’t really think about what watershed we’re in,” she said. “Now I think about the water—and sediment—leaving here, going down Elk Creek to the Delaware (River) and eventually ending up in Perry (Reservoir).

Priority areas the RFFP highlighted for Karns and Emmert included restricting cattle access to the pond and creek; developing alternative water sources for the cattle in the pasture, and moving the fuel barrel further away from the well.

Karns said prior to completing the RFFP, the couple didn’t think about the fuel barrel’s proximity to the household well. They had, in fact, just relocated it to another location within the perimeter of the well. “You don’t think about all those things,” she said. Since completing the RFFP, she said they moved the fuel barrel again—this time away from the well.

Overall, she said the notebook raises awareness for a landowner and farmer alike. “I’m a firm believer in the whole program,” she said.

To implement a plan for the remaining two priority areas, Karns was then approved for cost-share to run a waterline to an alternative watering system. Karns updated an existing well at the top of the hill, allowing the water to gravity feed to the three watering points in the pasture.

Working with Jackson County Conservation District, Cheri also received non-point source (NPS) funding through the State Conservation Commission to assist in purchasing two automatic waterers. Karns also installed a third watering point—a hydrant and water tank combination using her own funds.



**TOP:** Cheri Karns with an alternative watering point on her farm. **BOTTOM:** A newly installed hydrant and tank on Cheri’s farm. *Photos by Connie Pantle*

Installing these watering points allowed Karns and Emmert to fence the pasture into six different paddocks for a managed grazing system. Cheri works with her renter to develop a plan to utilize the forages—all while considering soil conservation and water quality on the farm.

To protect the riparian and timber areas, Karns received Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) funding through Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to fence the timber and riparian areas along the creek. The timber is flash grazed to control undergrowth and weeds—all while protecting the diversity of the area.

Karns said the farm’s timber is a beautiful area with a variety of trees and wildlife. She said Emmert worked to clean it up following the region’s ice

storm in December of 2007. “He is an avid woodsman,” she said, referring to his knowledge of forestry management and ability to properly identify trees.

Karns said looking back at history is enough to motivate her to make these changes on her farm. She and Emmert both recently read “The Worst Hard Time: The Untold Story of Those Who Survived the Great American Dust Bowl” by Timothy Egan. She said the book makes you think about the Dust Bowl and “relate it to where we are now”.

Karns feels managing the land is one way she can leave a legacy for her children and grandchildren. “We can’t control it but we can pick up and fix it. If we don’t—no one else will,” she said.

*The Kansas Department of Health and Environment has provided financial assistance to the Kansas Rural Center for his project through EPA Section 319 Nonpoint Source Pollution funding.*



*“How can you not love it?” Cheri Karns’ says of her Jackson County farm pictured here.*

*Photos by Connie Pantle*