CWF FARMER PROFILE:

Ken Reed

Allen County
Melvern Watershed
Chicken Creek &
Onion Creek;
Tributaries to Elm Creek

By Connie Pantle

A herd of calves graze near the waterer below the pond on the Reed Ranch near Allen, Kansas. The dam of the pond is in the background.

Photo by Connie Pantle

Allen, Kans.—If you visit the Reed Ranch, near Allen, Kans., you'll see that the land is utilized while being respected. Ken Reed's father instilled the value of land in him. "He is a farmer who always took care of the land," he said.

Ken's respect of the land is evident to other people as well. "Ken is continuing a legacy of caring for the land that his dad started," Dale Kirkham, one of the Kansas Rural Center's Clean Water Farm Project field organizers, said.

With this ideal in mind, Ken said it is more to his liking to utilize the land to raise calves, rather than row crops. Ken does all he can to use the land without causing a lasting, negative effect on it. "We want to make it work. There is a happy medium while making a living and taking care of the land," he said.

At this time, the Reed Ranch has 800 calves, although Ken said they can have up to 1,100 calves on the 1,080 acre ranch. In addition to his own calves, Ken backgrounds calves for a feedlot in Western Kansas. As an outdoorsman, Ken prefers to check the cattle on horseback and enjoys riding his horse everyday. "You can't count calves on a four wheeler," he said. In addition to Ken and his father, Ken's brother and son help operate the ranch.

A clean water meeting conducted by Paul Ingle, with the Melvern Lake Watershed Water Quality Project first drew Ken's attention to the River Friendly Farm Plan (RFFP) Environmental Assessment. Ken then completed the notebook which he said helped him organize his plans for the ranch. "It helps organize your thoughts of where you want to go and develop a long-term plan," he said. Ken said this was helpful, as he likes to keep the big picture in mind. "I don't want to start in and have to change it midway," he said. The priorities that Ken identified while completing the RFFP included stopping cattle pen run-off from polluting the creek; fencing off ponds and installing water tanks, and putting filter strips around farm ground near creeks.

The second of two ponds that Ken Reed reconstructed, installing a waterer below the pond's dam.

Photo by Connie Pantle

Following completion of the RFFP, Ken applied for cost-share through the RFF-CWFP. He said he was going to complete the projects regardless and the cost-share was an added incentive. "I was going to do the work anyway," he said, adding that it only took a phone call to get the application process started.

A variety of funding sources were used to make improvements on the ranch. In addition to the cost-share funding he received through RFF-CWFP, he also received funding through Natural Resource and Conservation Service's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), and the Melvern Lake Watershed Water Quality Project, which is a Flint Hills Resource, Conservation & Development project. Ken said the funding sources all worked well together to help him meet his goals. Paul agreed as he said that NRCS helped with designing the new livestock pens and a new pond for a water source, while the funding was supplemented with both EQIP and Melvern Lake WQ Project funds.

In order to supply the calves with a safe, reliable and clean drinking water source, Ken reconstructed a total of five ponds on his ranch. The RFF-CWFP assisted Ken with funding to rebuild two of those five ponds and add gravity fed tanks below the ponds. Ken uses the ponds to water cattle in pastures throughout his ranch. "We needed a place to water the cattle and didn't want to worry about them getting out on the ice," he said.

After extensive pond reconstruction including making one of the ponds larger, Ken added a tube leading to a gravity-fed watering tank below each of the two ponds' dams. The tanks are constructed from concrete with a pipe welded up each side and across the top to prevent cattle from getting in the waterers. One of the two ponds is now fenced, eliminating cattle from wading in the water which contaminates the water with manure and causes shore erosion. Paul said, "This also improves water quality in the pond. As Ken says, 'You don't want to get a good pond all cattled up.'" Ken says the cattle prefer to drink the clean water from the watering tanks instead of the pond. "The cattle will walk right by the pond and drink from the waterer," he said.

When the backgrounded calves first arrive at the Reed Ranch, they spend some time in one of five lots where Ken says they "learn to eat". After a short time in the lots, Ken turns the calves out on grass traps with access to the waterers below the ponds. The cattle he backgrounds are still grain fed, but the grass traps allow the manure to be distributed over a larger area than a lot.

Ken grass feeds the ranch's calves throughout most of the year. He also rotates the calves throughout several pastures throughout the year. This process allows the forage to recuperate and also allows him to cut some of the pastures for hay.

According to Paul, Ken "is a proactive producer who knows he needs to be ahead of the regulations, that good water quality for his livestock will also help improve his bottom line, and that he needs to always find new, more efficient ways of doing the cattle business".

Ken, who always keeps the future in mind, makes improvements while considering water quality and conservation of the land. Ken sees it as an investment as he hopes to pass the ranch on to future generations.

Water Quality Concerns:

- Stop cattle pen runoff into creek
- Fence off ponds
- Filter strips around farm ground near creeks

Best Management Practices Implemented:

- Reconstructed two ponds
- Installed gravity fed waterers
- Fenced one pond

Concrete tanks serve as waterers at the Reed Ranch. This is one of two waterers that Ken Reed installed using cost-share through the RFF-CWFP.

Photo by Connie Pantle