CWF FARMER PROFILE:
David Zeit

Brown County

Plum Creek
Delaware WRAPS

By Connie Pantle

Fairview, Kansas—David Zeit's ties to Northeast Kansas run deep. David grew up in southern Doniphan County just northeast of Huron. Once he wanted to establish his own farm, he ventured one county west—to Brown County. The land where he farms south of Fairview was once owned by his wife, Nita's grandfather. David now runs around 70 cow/calf pairs on his farm located near Plum Creek in the Delaware River Watershed.

Over the past few years David has made changes to address water quality on his farm and downstream. In 2003, there were high levels of nutrients in David's area of Plum Creek, therefore Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) stepped in. To reduce the nutrient levels, it was determined by KDHE that David should relocate his feedlot further up the fill away from the creek, a tributary to Plum Creek.

Working together, KSU Extension, Brown County Conservation District and the Kansas Rural Center all helped David come up with a plan to relocate and redesign his feedlot. And to assist in the financial aspect of relocating the feedlot, David applied for KRC's Clean Water Farms-River Friendly Farms Project (CWF-RFFP) cost-share and non-point source pollution funding through the Brown County Conservation District.

"I really appreciate all the help-- planning and financial," David is quick to say. "It's a lot to take on alone."

David Zeit, Fairview, stands in front of his new wintering pens, which he relocated further up the hill from the original site.
Photo by Ed Reznicek

Water Quality Concerns:

- Stream contamination due to cattle access and proximity of cattle wintering facilities near creek.

Best Management Practices Implemented:

- Abandoned wintering pens near Plum Creek tributary
- Converted abandoned area to grass
- Constructed four pens on top of hill
- Converted cropland below new pens to a grass buffer to filter water leaving pens
- Installed mechanical and natural windbreaks
- Installed alternative watering source for cattle

With the financial assistance, David built a new feedlot further up the hill on what had been cropland. Moving it to this location required a great deal of earthwork, including leveling two upper terraces and rebuilding a lower terrace.

Below the pens, David converted 3.5 acres of former cropland to switchgrass. The switchgrass filters the nutrients from the feedlot runoff before it flows into the creek. David will harvest hay from this section, utilizing the nutrients.

Due to the new pens' location atop a hill, David installed a new series of windbreaks for the cattle. Just to the north of the winter feeding area, he planted a natural windbreak of red cedar trees. To protect the herd in the calving area, he installed a mechanical windbreak of a 154' galvanized metal wall. "The cattle are more content now," David said. "They are drier, warmer and more productive."

One of David's main goals is to make his operation less labor-intensive. "My kids are grown and have lives and families of their own. So I am more and more a one-man operation," he explained. According to Ed Reznicek, CWFP field organizer, "the redesigned facilities will improve the productivity of his cattle enterprise, while making the management of the enterprise easier."

Before receiving cost-share through the CWF-RFFP, David completed the River Friendly Farms environmental self-assessment. One area the assessment highlighted for David was his manure management program. David said the price of fertilizer has made this even more necessary. He said he is currently searching for a reasonably priced manure spreader so that he can apply the manure from the lots to his crop ground.

Due to these changes, David is now in compliance with KDHE. David said completing this project allows him to have "better control of environmental issues" like water quality on his farm and downstream. "We are all dependent on a good source of water—which is one of the elements we have to have," he said.

For anyone looking at making similar changes on their farm, David urges them to "thoroughly research the financial aspect."

TOP: *David Zeit planted a filter strip of switch grass between his new wintering pens and the tributary to Plum Creek. The switch grass will filter any runoff from the lots before it reaches the creek.*
BOTTOM*: David installed a mechanical windbreak of galvanized metal as well as a natural windbreak of cedar trees to shelter the cattle from harsh winter winds.*

Photos by Ed Reznicek

"Make sure you have an excellent lender to work with," he said. "Even though there is financial assistance available from a variety of sources, you need a good lender."

But David went on to say, "Maybe the most important thing is the support of your family. When you are trying to do most of the work yourself, not hire it done, it gets stressful for the whole family," he explained. "I needed and appreciated all their support!"
David's concern for water also led him to serve on

the board of the Nemaha/Brown Watershed #7 as the secretary. He also serves as the chairman for the stakeholder leadership team for the Delaware Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategy (WRAPS).

David said he got involved several years ago with the Delaware WRAPS to see what it entailed and "just stuck with it". According to David, WRAPS is a way to "educate the ordinary person about the importance of water quality." He added there are many things that the people in the watershed can do to improve water quality, including implementing practices that "stop sedimentation and erosion and reduce the impact of chemicals."

"There is always somebody downstream," he said. "I'm one little speck, but 10 little specks make a big difference," 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.

David installed an access road and feed bunks to his cattle pens. The pens will allow David to scrape the pens regularly and apply the manure to his crop fields to utilize the nutrients..
Photo by Ed Reznicek