

## CWF FARMER PROFILE:

# Larry Abeldt

## Dickinson County Turkey Creek Watershed Turkey Creek

By Rick Davis

*Hope, Kansas*—Cedar Vale Farm, located near Hope in Dickinson County, is a diversified family operation including Larry and Nadine Abeldt, along with their sons Aaron, Joe, and Joshua, all in their early thirties and late twenties, and Austin, 14. Because of unforeseen medical problems starting seven years ago, Joe and Josh now completely operate the farm, along with Aaron who helps, and Austin who will be a freshman at Chapman High School this fall. They are also working with a neighbor on his operation which includes a substantial cow herd.

They are the fifth generation to be involved in the farm operation which dates back to 1871 when Larry's great-grandfather moved to Kansas from Wisconsin in a covered wagon and brought a small herd of sheep.

Much of the crop production from 509 acres of cultivated land is used for feed for approximately 1,500 sheep. The sheep are grazed on fields near the headquarters when possible, but are partially maintained in lots adjacent to the farmstead. Other components of the Abeldt family farm include raising crops with some irrigation and hay production and sales.



**BEFORE:** Water ran through the sheep lot at Cedar Vale Farm where it picked up fecal coliform bacteria. Photo by Dale Kirkham



**AFTER:** The Abeldts reshaped the sheep lot and installed a pipeline to divert the water beneath the lot. Photo by Rick Davis

### Water Quality Concerns:

- Run off from sheep confinement area containing fecal coli form bacteria and nutrients
- Potential contamination of well water used for livestock watering
- Nutrient management on cropland

### Best Management Practices Implemented:

- Installed a grass buffer to filter runoff from sheep holding lots
- Shaped drainage way
- Installed a pipe to carry water from retention dike.
- Seeded and fenced buffer area
- Construction of diversion/sediment pond
- Planted grass to waterways and terraces
- Reduced tillage on cropland

While completing the River Friendly Farm Plan environmental assessment, Larry and his family found additional components to add to their family farm plan. “We thought we had about every base covered. Every producer should take the time to complete the workbook. You’ll discover some facet you hadn’t thought of,” he said.

The water quality concerns that were raised during completion of the RFFP included: runoff containing fecal coliform bacteria and nutrients from sheep confinement area; and the potential contamination of well water used for livestock watering, and nutrient management on the cropland. To address these concern associated with drainage from the lots, the Abeldts worked with the local conservation district, the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, and KRC’s Clean Water Farm-River Friendly Farms Project (CWF-RFFP).

Best management practices (BMPs) were implemented using CWF-RFFP cost-share



***BEFORE:** The above photo illustrates the drainage problem occurring in the sheep lot at Cedar Vale Farm. The Abeldts applied for and received cost-share from the Kansas Rural Center to correct this issue.*  
*Photo by Dale Kirkham*



***AFTER:** While reshaping the sheep lot, the Abeldts also tore down a shed in the area that is now a grass buffer.*  
*Photo by Rick Davis*

from KRC to address some of those concerns. A grass buffer was installed to filter runoff from the sheep holding lots. This included removal of a shed; shaping of the drainage way; installation of a pipe to carry water from a retention dike to the south, and seeding and fencing of the buffer area.

In addition, a diversion and sediment pond were constructed on the eastern portion of the site, allowing for future expansion. Grassed waterways and terraces, along with

reduced tillage practices have been implemented throughout the cultivated fields to reduce erosion.

“Rather than trying to increase the acres farmed, we are developing projects on our existing acreage that will increase farm income,” Larry explained.

“I’m very happy we were able to install a grass filter, rather than having to build the expensive lagoon first recommended,” he said.

The Abeldt’s family farm plan doesn’t stop with enhanced agricultural production. “We’re committed to educating young people and the general public about clean water, air, soil and living resources, whether it’s plants or animals,” Larry said.

The Abeldts are in the process of establishing a sheep Education Production Research and Resource Center. The goal is to train people in applied sheep production and using cell grazing which include summer and winter forages. The center will be available to universities, junior colleges, 4-H and FFA project schools, judging teams, shearing

schools and housing for lambing schools during lambing.

Larry also believes lease hunting and agritourism have potential to increase farm income. “I’ve visited with many individuals who were raised on a farm, but no longer live there. They would like to be able to take their children and grandchildren to a working farm to show how they grew up.” Imagine an evening that included a farm tour, hayrack ride and hearty country meal, followed by a barn dance.

While the Abeldts recognize the challenges and opportunities of the future, they have not lost sight of their family tradition. With the Abeldt’s vision, future visitors to their farm won’t have to rely on memories.

“With today’s challenges in production agriculture, it’s going to take a little luck along with good management. Just plain hard work used to make farming successful, but not anymore. I wish all the young people coming back to the farm, the best of luck,” says Larry.