

CWF Project Profile: Eric Babbitt

Cherokee County Tar Creek Neosho Watershed

Whole Farm Plan Leads to “New” Farm

by Dale Kirkham



Eric Babbitt and son Tyler, above, installed one-half mile of permanent fencing to protect the pond and drainage flowing into it from livestock access.

Columbus, Ks. - One might call the Babbitt livestock farm a “scratch” operation. Eric Babbitt and his family are building everything in their program from “scratch” or the ground up.

The Babbitts bought their 120-acre farm in 2000 and started building for the future. The farm consisted of 26 acres of cropland in two fields and the balance in

Water Quality Concerns:

- Livestock waste runoff into stream and pond;
- Stream bank erosion;
- Fertilizer and chemicals in silt run-off from cropland.

Best Management Practices Implemented:

- Converted 26 acres of highly erodible cropland to grass;
- Fenced livestock from pond and drainage area into pond (3000 feet of fencing);
- Installed a freeze proof waterer as alternative water source.

woods and pasture, some native and some tame grass. The first major project was construction of a home. Eric spent nine months building their log-style home, doing most of the work himself with some help from his retired father. This was accomplished while working full-time as a journeyman lineman for Empire District Electric Company. He has since constructed a shop building and is making plans to build cattle working pens in the near future.

Eric recognized that the land needed protection and improvement to be productive if he was to realize his goal of developing a small cow/calf operation. The crop fields showed signs of soil erosion and the pastures were overgrazed and invaded with brush. He also wanted to clean up the water running into a pond on the south end of the property. Eric utilized the self-environmental assessment of the River Friendly Farms Whole Farm Planning process to develop priorities for improving the property.

With guidance from Dennis Elbrader,

Cherokee County Extension Agent, and cost-share assistance from KRC, Eric started making improvements. A fourteen-acre field was sprigged to Midland 99 Bermuda grass in early May 2002 after lime and fertilizer were applied to soil test results. A seven-inch rain soon after sprigging prevented application of the desired weed control but the field still produced one ton per acre of hay in late summer. With extensive tillering and full ground cover in 2003, he approached his goal of six tons of hay per acre.

“Soil testing and timely fertilizer applications are essential to meeting this goal,” Eric said. A field of 12 acres was sprigged to Bermuda grass in mid-April 2003 to provide additional hay. Hay not needed for his livestock is sold to improve cash flow while he expands his cowherd. A freeze-proof waterer was also installed in 2002 to provide a clean water alternative to the stream and pond.

In 2003, Eric installed one-half mile of permanent fencing to protect the pond and drainage flowing into it from livestock access. “Keeping the cows out of the wooded areas along the stream has sure made it easier to check them during calving,” stated Eric. This project will also improve water quality and wildlife habitat in the wooded area adjacent to the pond. Eric is an avid outdoorsman and is passing this interest onto his son, Tyler, who helped him with the fencing project.

Removing the invading trees from the pastures has been an ongoing effort. Osage orange, cedar and honey locust had invaded the grazing areas and reduced forage available to the cattle. Eric recognized that more grass

production would be needed to reach his goal of a 20 to 30 head cowherd. Cross fencing, rotational grazing, and additional waterers are being considered as ways to speed the recovery of the grass and increase grazing capacity.

Eric Babbitt is a builder with goals and a plan. First came the house for his family, then the outbuildings, fencing, and improvements to the forage and water supplies for his growing herd of beef cattle. He shows pride in what he has built from “scratch” in a few years, and enthusiasm for what comes next.

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