

**WORKING FOR CLEAN WATER
AND THRIVING FARMS:**

*Farm Profiles
From The
Clean Water Farms Project*

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Introduction

In July 1995, the Kansas Rural Center launched the Clean Water Farms Project - a multi-year project to help farmers and ranchers in Kansas adopt farming practices that address water quality issues, primarily those associated with run-off from farms and ranches into the state's streams, rivers and lakes. Agricultural non-point source pollution, which includes run-off from agricultural pesticides and fertilizers, nutrients and bacteria from livestock manure, suspended solids and erosion, is the number one problem in many Kansas streams, rivers, and lakes.

Although long recognized as a serious problem, non-point source pollution has increasingly become a controversial and complicated issue. Conflicts arise between rural and urban interests, and agricultural and environmental interests concerning the impact on drinking water quality, recreational use of the state's waters, and ecosystem health overall. Questions arise as to who is responsible? Who should pay? How clean is clean? Are the expectations practical or realistic? and what, for the farmer, are practical solutions to the problems?

For over twenty years the Kansas Rural Center, a non-profit research, education, and advocacy organization, has worked to promote an environmentally sound, economically viable, and sustainable system of agriculture. A large part of our focus has been on helping farmers find practical, low-cost sustainable solutions on the farm - through on-farm research and demonstrations, workshops and tours. These efforts on working farms across the state come from a strong belief that often the farmer is the best teacher, and farmer to farmer transfer of information is the best way of passing along new ideas or information.

Several basic objectives underlie our on-farm work. The first is to help the farmer maintain control over the decisions that affect his or her farm and family. The second is to protect the environment and natural resource base, particularly water. This is based on the premise that the long-term sustainability of our farms, our food system, our communities, and ultimately the planet, depend on how well we protect our resource base of soil and water. The final objective is to provide sound, practical information to help farmers make good resource decisions that have positive environmental and economic benefits.

Through appropriate management of nutrients, use of legume based crop rotations, integration of livestock, forages, cover crops and properly used animal manures to build soil and reduce erosion, and improving grass based livestock systems, sustainable farming practices can protect water quality. Because these practices reduce the purchase of off-farm inputs and make better use of on-farm resources, they combine environmental protection and economic profitability- benefiting the farm family, the environment, and the communities downstream. Nearly every principle of sustainable agriculture has a direct or indirect benefit that protects water quality.



Providing good examples of these often low-cost, easily adoptable practices has been the primary goal of the Clean Water Farms Project. With funding from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Non-point Source Section 319 Funds through the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, the Kansas Rural Center was able to merge the above objectives with the financial support needed to work with farmers and ranchers to solve problems and make changes on their farms that have both environmental and economic benefits.

By September 2001, the Clean Water Farms Project had provided nearly \$150,000 in cost-share funds to 35 farmers and ranchers in 20 counties covering over 24,000 acres in eight of the twelve major river basins in the state. The size of the participating farms ranges from 60 acres to over 5,000 acres, averaging between 500-600 acres, and covering a wide range of operations and management styles. Through on-farm demonstrations, farm tours, workshops, feature stories in the media, and farmer networks, we brought those good examples or models of clean water farming practices to hundreds of other farmers and ranchers.

And like Johnny Appleseed, we have begun to see an expanding “crop” of similar practices and changes taking root around the state. Water quality will continue to be a controversial and complicated issue, but based on the examples highlighted in the following pages, farmers and ranchers do have options that begin to address the concerns that both farm and non-farm citizens have about the future of our water supply.