

## Joan and Jim Vibert Franklin County

## Convert Conventional Cropland to Horticultural Crops



### Cooperator:

Joan and Jim Vibert  
1981 Indiana Road  
Ottawa, Ks. 66067

### Watershed:

Marais des Cygnes

### Water Quality Concerns:

Run-off from conventionally cropped land into pond used for irrigating horticultural crops

### Demonstration:

\* Develop diversion for run-off from cropland to pond; \* Develop irrigation system from pond for organic vegetable production on cropland converted from conventional practices

The market garden operation of Jim and Joan Vibert in Franklin County, is a unique demonstration for the Kansas Rural Center's Clean Water Farms Project. Funded at a modest level, it is the only market gardening operation for the project.

The Clean Water Farms advisory team approved this project for three main reasons. First, the operation had a fundamental water quality and water supply issue. Second, it had good potential for alternative production and marketing enterprises with its location near urban areas. And finally, it had good education poten-

tial because of its location, the Vibert's willingness to host visitors, and the relationship between a market garden and customers.

Located a few miles southwest of Ottawa, the Vibert's farm totals 98 acres with 16 acres of cropland and the balance in pasture and timber. Not earning any net profits from the conventional cropland, the Viberts decided to convert some of the cropland to a market gardening enterprise.

A three acre pond on the farm, located fairly close to the cropland, offered good irrigation potential, but



*The Vibert's organic market garden provided educational opportunities for their urban customers, like the tour above. They use their pond for irrigation water for the garden. It was their concern about the water quality, that led them to divert run-off from neighboring cropland around the pond, relying on run-off from across pasture land.*

the water quality was compromised by substantial runoff from conventionally farmed neighboring cropland. The Viberts developed their production for organic certification, both to protect water quality and to gain some marketing advantage.

They first addressed the issue of pond water quality. After considering construction of a natural filtering system, they determined there wasn't enough room between the field and the pond for an effective filter. Thus they diverted the field runoff around the pond. They were confident that there was still sufficient runoff area over grass to supply the pond, and so far this has held true.

The other components of the project were to develop an inexpensive pumping system to deliver water from the pond to the production plots, along with drip irrigation in the garden plots, and to host numerous educational tours for their vegetable customers.

The Viberts produce a wide array of vegetables. They start their transplants in a plastic lined hoop greenhouse. Outside, the crops are planted

in long narrow beds for ease of planting, weeding, watering and picking. The Viberts use green manure cover crops and compost as the foundation of their organic soil fertility program.

They market much of their production through farmers' markets, primarily the Barstow Organic Market in Kansas City along with the Lawrence farmers market. But with much of their tomatoes, they are canning and marketing a value added product as part of a tomato growers cooperative. The member cooperators pool labor and supplies to can whole tomatoes and salsa in a licensed commercial kitchen. This provides a way to utilize tomato surplus beyond farmers' market sales, and it provides a product that can be marketed out of season, extending the marketing year for member producers.

While their operation does not have the water quality threat of a livestock operation, the number of conventional farms converting small acreages to market gardening operations is growing. And any time you are selling directly to customers, water quality is an issue.