

CWF FARMER PROFILE: Mike & Pat Wulf

Pottawatomie County Lower Big Blue Watershed Clear Creek, tributary to Lower Black Vermillion River

By Connie Pantle

Blaine, Kans.—Several years ago, Mike and Pat Wulf had the opportunity to purchase Pat’s family farm. According to Pat, the farm has been in her family for several generations. Pat’s parents moved there as newlyweds in 1939 and she was raised there. Pat remembers the way the farm looked when she was a child and pictured it looking like that once again.

To reach that goal, the Wulfs had some obstacles to overcome. “We knew there were some real conservation issues on this farm,” Pat said. In addition, the couple wanted to convert the then cropland to grass. “We wanted to raise cattle and not the crops,” she said. However, the Wulfs were concerned about the grazing and water issues that would impact the animals.

To address these conservation issues, the Wulfs started researching available cost-share grants. They learned about the River Friendly Farms environmental assessment and the Kansas Rural Center’s Clean Water Farms project through the local Natural Resource and Conservation Service in Pottawatomie County.

Mike credits Pat with the accomplishment of completing the assessment. “We learned a lot from it,” Pat said. “It makes you sit down and do a plan.” Pat said without the assessment, the changes they wanted to make “could have been overwhelming, but it makes you take a hard look at the farm”.



Mike and Pat Wulf holding newborn Boer goat kids.

Photo by Mary Howell

The couple recognized early on in the process their priority areas including: the need for improved water quality, implementation of rotational grazing, and brush and weed control. To make these improvements, the Wulfs applied for and were approved to receive cost-share through the RFF-CWFP. “We knew we wanted to do these things and the cost-share was a huge incentive,” Pat said.



One of the three Great Pyrenees guard dogs on Mike and Pat Wulf’s farm watches over a herd of Boer meat goats.

Photo by Mary Howell

Mike and Pat said the CWFP provided them with many resources to determine what would work best for their farm. They also valued the input of KRC’s field organizer, Mary Howell. “Mary was very helpful. She is a good resource person,” Pat said.

Through the CWFP, the Wulfs have been able to add cool and warm season grasses to their management intensive grazing (MIG) program. The Wulf’s cost-share plan included planting

former cropland with a variety of these grasses. Turnips and oats were drilled in a 29 acre field. Mike read about using turnips for grazing in a farm publication magazine and wanted to try it with their own cattle herd. Mike said the cattle first ate the tops, followed later by the bulbs. According to the Kansas Rural Center's management guide, turnip leaves have 12 to 19 percent crude protein and the roots have nine to 12 percent crude protein. The couple's plan also included planting 30 acres of brome and alfalfa; 27 acres of MaxQ fescue, and 29 acres of sudex. As a final phase of their plan, the Wulfs planted an additional field of fescue and a field Eastern Gama grass this year. The couple says these cool season grasses compliment their 80 acres of native pasture. "We have a nice balance of the two types with the cool weather grasses and warm weather grasses," Mike said.

Two waterers, which are supplied by rural water, were added near the barns for the goats. "Automatic is the word," Mike said. "It helps to have fresh water in front of them." The Wulfs installed approximately 150 feet of waterline to accommodate the waterers. Additionally, the Wulfs ran waterline and added pop-up waterers and tanks throughout the pastures. To limit the cattle herds' access to the creek, the couple fenced 3/8 mile of creek.

The goats were originally introduced on their former farm to control the noxious weed, sericea lespedeza. "After that, we just kind of kept them," Mike said. The Wulfs now have approximately 80 head of Boer meat goats including nanny goats, kids and bucks. "It does take a lot of goats to clean it up the way you want" Mike said. Recently, the couple added a number of purebred Boer goats to the herd. Typically, Mike and Pat sell the goats through the sale barn or they sell the kids to another farmer who direct markets them. To protect the goats from coyotes and other predators, the Wulfs have enlisted the help of three Great Pyrenees guard dogs and a llama. The goats graze along side the couples' 30 head of cow/calf pairs within the woven and barbed wire fence.

Water Quality Concerns:

- Sediment erosion in highly erodible cropland
- Livestock access to creek

Best Management Practices Implemented:

- Converted 86 acres of cropland to grass and forages
- Implemented management intensive grazing system
- Installed an alternative watering system as part of the MIG



Mike and Pat Wulf's goats and cattle graze alongside each other on the couple's farm near Blaine.

Photo by Mary Howell

Mike and Pat's projects continue to be an ongoing effort. "We're doing it all in phases," Pat said. Last year the Wulfs were approved for an EQIP grant through the Pottawatomie County NRCS. Projects for this grant include many improvements to the couples' MIG program. Projects include planting more Eastern gamma grass; adding a well, pond and waterlines; building additional fencing, and completing tree clipping.

In the next ten years, the couple hopes to have the farm planted entirely in grasses, have the cross fencing completed, and the existing brush cleaned up. While the Wulfs know the work will continue, they like to joke with each other about it. "We can just retire and look at it," Mike said. "Then all we'll have to do is open the gate and move the cows," Pat added with a smile.