CWF FARMER PROFILE:
Joe Zarybnicky

Washington County
Lower Little Blue Watershed

By Connie Pantle

Joe Zarybnicky (left) explains why he chose to install concrete water tanks and hydrants as a water supply in five cells of his rotationally grazed pasture during a tour of his farm on August 24, 2007.

Photo by Connie Pantle

Hanover, Kansas—The quality of water on his Washington County farm is important to Joe Zarybnicky, Hanover. "I don't want water to runoff my farm, but what does—I want it to be clear!"

So Joe, who custom grazes 70 cow/calf pairs on 200 acres, began to look for ways to make improvement to the water quality on his farm.

Tom Meek, who was with the Washington County Natural Resource and Conservation Service (NRCS) at that time, played a large role in providing Joe with the programs and cash flow to implement change on his farm. Although Tom said it was a learning experience for the both of them he added, "I think I learned more from Joe, than he learned from me."

One of the programs that Joe worked with to achieve his goal was the Kansas Rural Center's Clean Water Farms Project (CWFP). He said he first heard of the CWFP at a Conservation Security Program (CSP) informational meeting. At that meeting, he said he was told to talk to CWFP Field Organizer Mary Howell and as luck would have it--she was there.

So with Mary's assistance, Joe completed the River Friendly Farm Plan (RFFP) and went on to apply for cost-share through the CWFP. Joe said he thought the CWFP program was something interesting and it appealed to him for two reasons: first of all, he could implement ways to keep the water cleaner and in turn, benefit the cattle.

After taking about 70 acres out of the Conservation

Water Quality Concerns:

- Livestock access to pit ponds
- Quality of water in pit ponds
- Stream bank stabilization

Best Management Practices Implemented:

- Installed an alternative watering system in five cells as part of a rotational grazing system
- Fence pit ponds to exclude cattle
- Excluded cattle from stream to allow vegetation to aid in stream bank stabilization

Reserve Program (CRP) a few years ago, Zarybnicky decided to utilize the ground (in addition to another 130 acres) for a rotational grazing program. "It was marginal cropland and I couldn't see putting a plow through a good stand of grass," he said.

One of the five concrete tanks (supplied by hydrants) Joe Zarybnicky installed in individual cells of his rotational grazing program.

Photo by Connie Pantle

At that time, he was using pit ponds for a water source for the cattle. "One thing I noticed was the blacker the dirt, the more mucking up the cows would do. The calves wouldn't drink after the cows were in the pond." Joe wanted to discontinue use of the black dirt pit ponds, fence the ponds and provide a reliable water source for the cattle.

Joe had access to rural water for a water source, therefore, he used CWFP cost-share to run water lines to five cells and install hydrants. He received State Conservation Commission to purchase concrete tanks, as well as cross-fencing for the rotational grazing system. Before installing the tanks, he layered rock over geo-textile fabric. The tanks were then installed over the rock to keep mud at bay.

He chose to use the hydrants after he "talked to other people who had tanks with the water directly in them who had problems and issues." He said those farmers ended up pulling their tanks up for repair, so Joe decided against running the water line directly in the tank.

With the hydrants, the method he uses includes a hose from the hydrant connected to a float in the tank. One problem Joe encountered during a recent hot spell was the overflow of one tank due to cattle getting in the tank and breaking the float. After this episode, Joe observed the cattle didn't attempt to get in the tanks in the cells with shade. To prevent this in the future, Joe plans to install guards in the tanks. He said he also plans to provide shade in all cells as a longer term solution.

Joe said rotational grazing allows the cattle to "harvest that forage better" which in turn allows him to increase the number in the herd. In this type of system, the cattle eat a wider variety of grasses and forbs, including those with higher protein values. "They utilize the forbs and grasses better than if they were in a continuously grazed pasture," he said.

Mary said Joe has a "love for the grass that drove him to create this system that continuously improves the grass."

As an additional part of the project, Joe also planned to stabilize a portion of his streambank that was sloughing off into the creek. Upon further inspection, willows and other vegetation were growing up, in turn, stabilizing the streambank. Joe credits excluding the cattle from the riparian area seven or eight years ago, allowing the streambank to heal itself. Joe said that when left alone "nature took care of itself."

Joe said he has achieved goals with the project. "I've kept the cattle out of the stream and pit ponds. And there is cleaner water going off the farm," he said.