

# Rain Does Not Hamper Washington County Tours

Scheer and Zarybnicky Tours Sponsored by

Kansas Rural Center,

Kansas Graziers Association and

Kansas Center for Sustainable Agriculture and Alternative Crops

Washington County, Kansas—On a rainy Friday, August 24, around 50 people gathered for a tour of two Washington County farms. The two farmers featured on the tour, Michael Scheer and Joe Zarybnicky implemented managed rotational grazing and alternative water supply systems on their farms. Both cattle operations are enrolled in the Conservation Security Program (CSP) for their rangeland management. In addition, Scheer and Zarybnicky worked with the Kansas Rural Center to complete the River Friendly Farm environmental assessment. And both farmers received funding through KRC's Clean Water Farms Project (CWFP) to implement their watering systems.



The first stop at Scheer's farm, just south of Morrowville, highlighted Michael's solar-powered alternative livestock watering system and a rotational grazing program. Scheer implemented the watering system using CWFP cost-share. The solar-powered system features a 4,000 gallon storage tank that gravity feeds water to three tanks throughout the 500 acres. Scheer then built grazing cells radiating from each of the tanks.

Mary Howell, CWFP field organizer, said "water is the key element to a managed grazing program." She said Scheer "utilized an existing windmill well, adding a solar component and gravity fed waterlines, to provide water to his managed grazing program."

Since implementing the rotational grazing system several years ago, Scheer said he's learned to focus on the quality of the grass. "When I come

out here (to the pasture) I look at the grass—not the cows," Scheer said. He said the cows find him when they are ready to be moved.

Scheer said he's learned a lot and if he were to do things over, he would pay closer attention to the location of the water

tanks. A location with out any obstacles in the cattle's line of sight is best, he explained.

As the rain exited from Sheer's pasture, Jon Immink, who lives just across the state line near Endicott, Nebraska, spoke about establishing a



TOP: Michael Scheer informs tour-goers of what they will see on his farm near Morrowville. BOTTOM: John Henry, NRCS Range Specialist, talks about the yearly cycle of a grass plant..

Photos by Connie Pantle



*TOP LEFT: Scheer talks about one of the tanks he uses to supply water for his rotational grazing program. TOP RIGHT: Wildlife biologist, Clinton Thornton said that Scheer's pasture, with its cleared hilltops, is a good location for wildlife. BOTTOM LEFT Scheer talks about positioning tanks in a clear area of the pasture, so the cattle can see without hindrance. BOTTOM RIGHT: A view across Scheer's pasture hilltop.*

*Photos by Connie Pantle*

grazing system. In particular, Immink, who is a grazing mentor to Scheer, offered advice about taking time to implement a system and the importance of building a relationship with landlords.

John Henry, Natural Resource and Conservation Service (NRCS) District Range Specialist, illustrated the components of a grass plant. He explained during the grazing season, 95 percent of a grass plant's food production is above ground. He also explained the utilization of forages in a rotational grazing system as opposed to a conventional pasture—pulling a grazed ragweed plant up to illustrate.

In addition, Clinton Thornton, a wildlife biologist with the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, spoke about the programs available to improve wildlife habitat on the farm. Thornton added that Scheer's pasture is conducive to wildlife with its variety of plant species and lowlying covered areas.

Following lunch at the Washington County Fairgrounds, Howell, Troy Schroeder, and Dale Kirkham, field organizers for KRC's CWF all spoke on different aspects of the CWF program and grazing. In addition, Kirkham provided some practical grazing management tips.

Additionally, Schroeder spoke about farm bill and possible cuts to government programs including such as CSP, which he said “promotes conservation on a whole farm basis.” Schroeder added that while CSP receives criticism for appearing to pay people for doing nothing, he regards it as a reward for people who are doing the right thing.

Tom Meek, Clay County Conservation district manager, touched on the importance of managing range and grassland. “Grass is the only crop with a memory” he said.

Dee Minge and Amy Bott, both of the Washington County Conservation District, spoke about the programs that are available with both federal and state funds including Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and State Conservation Commission funds like Zarybnicky used to build cross-fencing and purchase the water tanks.

Howell said the tours were examples of what can be achieved when agencies and farmers work together toward a common goal. “It took a combination of different agencies, along with farmers’ desires to complete a project,” she said. “We wanted to bring all those resources together for a tour to illustrate to other farmers what can be accomplished.”

As the tour group headed to Zarybnicky’s farm, near Hanover, the rain began again. However, the rain did not detour the farmers and ranchers from asking many questions and learning about Zarybnicky’s rotational grazing program. Zarybnicky’s system included running water line to five cells with hydrants and water tanks in each of those cells. Zarybnicky also received CWFPP cost-share to implement this alternative watering system.

Zarybnicky said that while everyone’s system is



*TOP: Joe Zarybnicky (third from right) discusses his rotational grazing program. BOTTOM: One of Zarybnicky’s concrete tanks he installed to meet the watering needs of his custom grazed cattle.*

*Photos by Connie Pantle*

going to be different, he said he learned by talking to other graziers and welcomed the tour group. “I would like to have other people follow some of these things I’ve implemented,” he said.

Howell said she was confident the farmers attending the tour “went away with how good your grass can look at the end of August with a managed grazing program.”

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