

KGA 2010 Conference

Pharo Steers Graziers Away from Sacred Cows

by Mark Parker

McPherson, Ks.- If Kit Pharo made some folks squirm in their chairs a little at the Kansas Graziers Association Winter Conference, that was okay with him. After all, getting cattlemen out of their comfort zones is one of his goals.

“Dare to be a herd quitter,” Pharo challenged a standing-room-only crowd recently in McPherson, Kan. “Break away from the status quo. Doing what everybody else is doing is very rarely the thing to do and it will never ever give you a competitive advantage.”

The Cheyenne Wells, Colo., producer bolted from the herd a long time ago, questioning conventional cattle wisdom in an effort to corral profit rather than production. In the short-grass, low rainfall country of eastern Colorado, Pharo raises beef and bulls in a system aimed at extremely low-input, sustainable production. His cattle receive no inputs beyond a weaning-time vaccination and a 50-50 salt mineral mix. Feeding hay is a very rare occurrence that happens only under the most extreme conditions.

Relating his own struggle to find profitability in ranching, Pharo discussed the marketplace challenge facing most producers.

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USDA EQIP Organic Initiative

Funds Available for Kansas Farmers for Organic Transition Practices

by Mary Fund



In August 2009, Kansas NRCS staff toured the Keating organic farm near Bennington Kansas as part of a training series on organic farming practices. The USDA EQIP Organic Initiative has \$1.4 million to offer farmers transitioning to organic practices or to existing organic farmers wanting to expand their certified acreage or add conservation measures. A new practice added this round is seasonal high tunnels. KRC file photo.

Whiting, Ks.- The Kansas Rural Center (KRC) is offering information to farmers interested in the transition to organic production. March 12, 2010 is the deadline for signing up for the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) 2010 Organic and Transition to Organic Initiative under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. Since organic farming is still relatively new to NRCS, KRC staff are providing information and connections to resources that will help farmers make decisions and get started in the program.

“Many farmers are interested but have a lot of fundamental questions not only about the EQIP Organic Initiative but organic farming and certification in general. While we can’t fill out the applications for you, we can answer questions and send you to the right people and places to find out what you need to know about organic production and the organic certification process. We can also put you in touch with existing organic producers who would be happy to answer your questions about organic farming. Our website (www.kansasruralcenter.org) also has links to important and useful information”, states Mary Fund, KRC Communications Director.

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Rural Papers

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Small Farmer Commentary

Working Upside Down With Water Concerns

by Dale Kirkham

Most folks have heard the old adage "You start at the bottom and work your way up in life". But this concept may be backwards when dealing with water quality and related issues in Kansas streams. The pertinent question arises—can we really solve problems in the main downstream sites if we have not addressed the contributing issues in the upstream areas?

Water issues are most obvious in downstream locations due to size or scale. A good example of this is streambank erosion. The larger the stream and the higher the bank, the easier it is to see the erosion and sloughing that happens year after year. While not easily observed in the upper reaches of a watershed, concentrations of sediment, nutrients and bacteria tend to accumulate as one moves downstream. At first glance, one should attack the problem where it is observed or measured. But is this really the best investment of resources?

At a landscape scale, multiple sources usually contribute to the larger issue at points further down the watershed. Phosphorus is a nutrient that commonly leads to eutrophication of ponds and reservoirs. It starts its' downstream journey from many sources across the landscape, including crop fields, cattle feeding and loafing areas, streambanks, lawns and gardens. The impact is much more easily observed well downstream from many of the sources .

Reducing the flow of phosphorus and other impairments into a pond or stream should logically start at multiple points of origin in upstream sites. Key to this approach is maintaining as much vegetative cover as possible to slow runoff and trap sediment, nutrients and bacteria. This applies across fields and pastures but also to riparian areas along channels where

water enters waterways and streams.

Cropping practices such as minimum tillage, no till, cover crops, and legumes in rotation all work to slow runoff and reduce soil and nutrient losses with runoff. Choice of crops is also a factor as high residue crops like corn, wheat and milo are more effective than soybeans, sunflowers and cotton at reducing runoff. All these practices are more effective when applied together than individually.

Grassland practices that slow runoff start with proper stocking rates to maintain a dense, healthy cover of vegetation and mulch. Managing grazing to spread livestock use broadly over pastures and avoid concentrations around ponds and streams also contributes to cleaner runoff. Location of salt/ minerals, watering sources and feeding areas affect grazing patterns.

Riparian areas of native timber that occur along the major streams and creeks of Kansas are nature's final filters of water running from the upland areas. Along larger streams with deep soils on the adjacent floodplains, deep-rooted trees like black walnut, bur oak, hackberry and elm slow and filter runoff but also protect and stabilize the streambanks. Planting and/or maintaining the natural riparian component is a proven practice for improving water quality.

On the smaller tributaries, healthy riparian zones contain fibrous-rooted grasses (prairie cordgrass, eastern gamagrass, and big bluestems), forbs (sawtooth sunflower, cupped rosinweed) and shrubs (buttonbush and indigobush amorphia). Protection from excessive grazing is often needed to achieve the full benefit of filtering runoff of impairments.

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Briefs

First DOJ Hearing on Competition Set for Iowa

Late last fall, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced the dates and locations of a series of joint workshops exploring competition, concentration and regulatory issues in agriculture industry.

The first meeting is scheduled for March 12, 2010, at the Des Moines Area Community College's FFA Enrichment Center in Ankeny, Iowa. The meeting, which is open to

the public and begins at 9 a.m. and concluded with time for public testimony from 4:15 p.m. to 5:15 p.m.

The meeting is free to the public but those interested in attending should register online at <<https://go.dmac.edu/ffa/agworkshop>>. (Or go to the KRC website at www.kansasruralcenter.org for the registration link.)

This workshop will be the introduction to the series but will focus on seed technology and agricultural trends.

According to many farmers and

ranchers, the workshops are long overdue as an essential step to address concentration of ownership within agriculture.

The food supply, from seed to grocery store shelf, essentially belongs to a handful of companies. As a result, prices are rising, research and innovation are restricted, fair contracts are difficult to negotiate, and farmers' and consumers' choices are increasingly limited.

The Iowa workshop will be attended by U.S. Department of Justice's Assistant Attorney General for the Antitrust Division Christine Varney and Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. The day will begin with a roundtable discussion featuring Varney, Vilsack, the Attorney General and Secretary of Agriculture from Iowa and (tentatively) U.S. Senators Harkin and Grassley, and Rep. Boswell.

Following the roundtable there will be three panels on Seed Competitiveness, Agricultural Trends, and Enforcement Issues.

Public testimony will be taken at the conclusion of the day.

For the entire schedule of meetings go to the KRC website, or the DOJ's Antitrust Division website at www.usdoj.gov/atr/events.htm. □

Small Farmer Commentary

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Worth noting is the fact that many of the measures indicated above are management practices that require little or no capital outlay by the land manager, but simply a change in operating techniques. On the other hand, larger mainstream projects are commonly more expensive. Where needed, they function best in combination with other management practices upstream to improve water quality.

The biggest beneficiaries of efforts to improve water conditions may be downstream or offsite but much of the action needs to take place in the upper parts of a watershed. On the other hand, all practices that protect the soil, water and grazing resources will enhance the productivity and sustainability of the land for farmers and ranchers. Community based approaches where people with a broad range of interests in water issues have proven to give positive results.

The Cheney Lake watershed project is classic example in which landuser projects

to improve water quality in the lake receives financial support from the city of Wichita whose residents benefit from a cleaner water supply. The farmers and ranchers in the Cheney Lake watershed recognize that the residents of Wichita and beyond are consumers of the food and other agricultural products that they grow.

Many watersheds around the state are currently involved in developing and implementing a Watershed Restoration and Protection plan for water quality and quantity in the lakes and streams. All of these encourage the participation of citizens who have an interest in the water resources of the area.

To learn more and get involved in improving the water and other natural resources in your area, contact your local County Conservation District office, your local WRAPS watershed, or the Kansas Rural Center at 785-873-3431. □

Dale Kirkham is a field coordinator with KRC's Clean Water Farms Project, and ranches in Greenwood County.

Heartland News

Pharo at KGA conference...
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Colorado cattleman Kit Pharo, (above center and left), challenged the large crowd of about 150 attending the Kansas Graziers Association's recent Winter Conference in McPherson. Photos by M. Parker.

"Most farmers and ranchers don't have much control over market prices. They're in a commodity business and that's a breakeven business." Selling a product, rather than a commodity, Pharo said, insulates producers from the cattle cycle but it's not an easy transition. If it were, he stressed, "Everybody would do it."

Those who continue to produce commodity beef, he stressed, must be better than average in terms of production and, especially, cost of production. Urging producers to step out of the box they've put themselves in, Pharo advised cattlemen to question business-as-usual beef production strategies.

"Farmers and ranchers are more productive than ever before but it's not showing up in their bottom lines," he said. "Usually, producers increase production to increase profits but it may be easier to (accomplish that) with reduced expenses." The average producer makes money when the cattle cycle peaks and then he loses

money in the valleys, Pharo said.

Low-input producers—about 10 percent of cattlemen—can make some money even when prices are low but they have to stay focused more on profit than production. Weaning weights, he noted, are an excellent case-in-point. Most cattlemen tend to strive to maximize weaning weights, he pointed out, declaring that most suffer from what he calls "Big Calf Syndrome."

"If you've ever owned at least two cows, you've suffered from Big Calf Syndrome," Pharo stated. "Big calves are not always profitable. Weaning weight has no real meaning without knowing what the cost of producing it is. Higher weaning weights cost you something—bigger cows to maintain, more feed, etc. A lot of Western ranches were put together and paid for with 350-lb. calves and now those same ranches are struggling to make it with 600-lb. calves. You can raise more lightweight calves with fewer inputs and they'll bring a higher per-pound price. You may not be able to brag

about weaning weights to your neighbors but, managed correctly, you can put more money in your pocket."

With a goal of making the most efficient use of forage resources, Pharo's strategy focuses on three main components:

- Utilizing planned rotational grazing to provide rest for the grass and maximize harvest efficiency.
- Calving in sync with Mother Nature to match the cow's peak nutritional requirements with the nutritionally highest forage production.
- Developing cows that fit their environment and are productive with minimal inputs while still meeting the requirements of the market place.

In a planned rotational grazing system, Pharo said the rule of thumb is to move the cattle fast when the grass is growing fast and slow when the grass is growing slowly. The aim, he said, is to put the highest number of cattle in the smallest possible area for the shortest amount of time.

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Protecting Water Has Livestock Benefits

By Mark Parker

McPherson, Ks- Reducing the impact livestock have on Kansas water resources is one of those rare Good News-Good News scenarios. The good news is that keeping the cows out of the water is extremely effective in maintaining and enhancing water quality. The other good news is that many of the practices used to achieve that goal are also good for beef producers' bottom lines.

Speaking to a large crowd of about 150 cattlemen at the Kansas Graziers Association's Winter Conference recently in McPherson, Kansas, Kansas State University Watershed Specialist Herschel George outlined the issue: "The problem is that when the cattle drink from the stream, they don't just drink," he said, pointing out that E. coli issues arise as well as sediment from increased bank erosion. Cattlemen, however, have a full toolbox of ways to address that situation.

Limited access to streams and ponds, spring development, solar pumps and remote water containers such as covered concrete waterers and tire tanks offer opportunities for stockmen. George noted that simply adding a water trough to a pasture that includes a stream reduces the amount of time cattle spend using the stream itself by 80 percent. It also cuts the time they spend in riparian areas by 56 percent and eliminates about 77 percent of bank erosion.

Emphasizing that each farm and ranch presents unique challenges and opportunities, George said that expertise is available to help livestock producers identify the most effective ways of protecting water quality in a manner that also benefits livestock.

K-State Watershed Specialist Will Boyer discussed some of the best management practices that have the dual benefit of protecting water quality and enhancing beef production. Rolling out hay away from water resources, rather than repeatedly using big round bale feeding sites, prevents the buildup of manure that can run-off into water supplies. It can result in less hay waste and less crowding as well as reducing health issues such as calf scours. Concentrated feeding areas, Boyer said, can also reduce gain potential because of muddy conditions and those hay feeding sites can lead to increased fly populations later in the season.

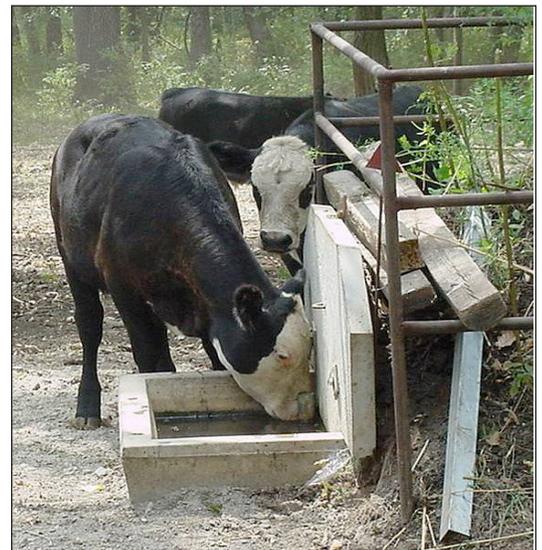
Boyer urged producers to move shelters, water supplies and feeding sites away from streams to protect the water as well as to improve grazing distribution. He told the crowd that there is plenty of opportunity for innovation and suggested they begin by establishing goals for what they want to accomplish.

Help with achieving those goals are available from several sources.

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Limiting access to ponds and streams reduces bank degradation and protects water quality. Geotextile fabric beneath a stone base protects the bank from erosion.



A covered tank beneath a pond dam not only protects the pond it can provide ice-free water for livestock.



A solar pump brings water from a pond to the storage tank at the left where it is provided in a tire tank. All above photos by H. George.

CWFP Profile

Improving Pasture and Watering Sites Make the Difference for South Central Rancher

by Connie Pantle

Pretty Prairie, Ks. –Walking along a hilltop on Darrin Unruh’s farm, he points out big bluestem and mentions seeing coneflowers during the summer months. Unruh is happy to see the natives return to his pasture in Reno County—and he knows their return didn’t just happen. Unruh has worked for several years to improve the pasture along the North Fork of the Ninescah River which runs through the family’s 320 acres.

Unruh knew it was a tough undertaking and sought the help of Lisa French, Cheney Lake WRAPS (Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategy) Coordinator.

To implement the plan and provide a water source on the south side of the river, Unruh said he worked with French and Range Specialist Chris Tecklenberg with Natural Resource and Conservation Service (NRCS), to develop a plan as well as seek cost-share for the improvements. One of the first steps was the completion of the River Friendly Farms Environmental self-assessment through the Kansas Rural Center, which French assisted him with.

The three priorities the RFFP notebook highlighted for Unruh included: degradation of pond and river due to livestock frequently entering the water; lack of plant



Reno County rancher Darrin Unruh points out improvements on his native pasture along the North Fork of the Ninescah River at Cheney Lake Water Quality tour. Photo C. Pantle

diversity and poor rangeland health; poor wildlife habitat around pond and no testing of well water.

Unruh explained that the pasture south of the river was the “weak link” in his plan. Several years ago Unruh utilized cost-share through Kansas Alliance of Wetlands and Streams (KAWS) and added a water source on the north side of the river. Now, he explained the trouble was the lack of an alternative water source on south side of the river.

In order to rotationally graze his herd of 90 cow/calf pairs, he needed a reliable water source throughout the pastures. Up to this point he was

limited in his grazing plan due to the river being the cattle’s only reliable source of water—a pond on the property typically dries up in low rainfall years. Plus, he said, he wanted to get the cattle out of the river.

Because of the sandy soil along the Ninescah River, Unruh explained any traffic from the cattle causes the banks of the river to slough off—ending up as sediment in Cheney Lake. A second downfall is that Unruh said once the cattle drink from the river, they tend to loaf in the river—causing a fecal coliform concern. “It is not good from a lot of different aspects...you don’t want it in your water and I don’t want it in the water.”

“We know that although many producers consider the environmental impacts of their management, they have many other considerations as well. We want to provide financial support for good decisions so that we don’t end up short-changing the water quality aspect if finances are short,” French said. Therefore, she assisted Unruh in seeking cost-share to implement the alternative water source and improve the pasture with funds through the Kansas Rural Center, the City of Wichita and Reno County Conservation District.

French explained the Cheney WRAPS has an agreement with the City of Wichita to provide financial assistance to projects that benefit Cheney Reservoir. “In most cases, we assist the producer in identifying a state or federal program—or one like Clean Water Farms— that provides some level of cost share for a project. Then the City provides additional funding not to exceed what the local

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Clean Water News

Unruh Profile....

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conservation district has determined as the average cost for that type of project,” she said.

Because there are no electrical lines near the property, Unruh utilized compressed air to pump water from a well. The 1000 gallon tank—a used anhydrous tank painted yellow and green—is labeled “compressed air”. According to French, “every week or so, the mobile tank can be hauled to the Co-op to refill with compressed air.” The compressed air pressure then pumps water from a well which is stored in 4,200 gallon storage tank. The tank then gravity feeds down to two tanks throughout the pasture. Although this has been an interesting experiment, Unruh has not been satisfied with the efficiency of the set-up. French said in the future he plans to use a solar pump that can be moved between pastures.

Unruh said he plans to keep improving it by adding additional watering sites and more paddocks. “I’d like to be able to water cattle wherever we want in the future,” he said.

Rotational grazing allows the cattle herd to utilize all of the pasture and allow grass to rest. Unruh said having a good stand of native grass is important to the health of not only his cattle, but also serves a greater purpose. “The grass filters runoff which results in higher quality of water going back into the river—which goes into Cheney,” he said.



Lack of electricity limited Unruh’s options for providing water in his pastures. He experimented with a used anhydrous tank converted to hold compressed air that pumped well water into a 4,200 gallon storage tank that gravity feeds water to two tanks in the pasture. Unruh has not been completely satisfied with the system, so may convert to a mobile solar pump. Photo by C. Pantle.

French explained that the practices Unruh has implemented will directly affect the reservoir. “Over time, Darrin has converted cropland back to grass, added water sources for livestock, reduced livestock access to the stream, and improved the health of the grass in the pastures. All of these practices reduce soil loss, nutrient loading, and bacteria levels,” And according to French “the proximity to the river means the reduction has maximum impacts on the reservoir.”

Unruh said education and communication are key in helping others “understand what we’re doing out here”. That is why Unruh said he hosts tours, as well as his wife’s elementary school classes on the farm. “The river is healthy,” he said, citing the macro-invertebrate organisms the children found living in the river.

French said Unruh’s project is a great example for others in the

watershed.

“We like to take other producers to his land because he wants people to know why he is making improvements and he provokes good discussions about the changes taking place within the grass ecosystem, along the riverbanks, and within his operating system,” she said.

And those tours give him an opportunity to show others the native grasses and wildflowers returning to the pasture. “This pasture was a wreck to this point, now we can start seeing results,” he said. Unruh said he knows his efforts are affecting the pasture. “I know that it is working by seeing the plant diversity in this pasture...every little thing is enhancing water quality, air quality,” he said. “We’re doing good things.” □

Sustainable Food System News

Farmers Markets Offer A Growing Opportunity

by Mark Parker



The Kansas Farmers' Market Conference for vendors or producers drew people from across the state to Emporia. Participants could attend nearly thirty workshops on a variety of topics ranging from production tips on specialty crops to food safety legislation. Photo by M. Taylor-Puckett

Emporia, Ks.- Cultivating a growing opportunity for farmers requires the cooperation of communities, policy makers and the growers themselves, according to a national authority on farmers markets.

Speaking to producers at the recent Kansas Farmers' Markets Conference in Emporia, Don Wambles, past president of the nationwide grassroots organization, the Farmers Market Coalition, called farmers markets "a bright spot for American agriculture."

As a mechanism for bringing wholesome, locally grown food to the public, farmers' markets benefit consumers and communities as well as the folks who grow the food, he said.

"The number of farmers markets across the country continues to grow because they benefit everyone," said Wambles who is the director of the Alabama Farmers' Market Authority. "We need to raise awareness about where to find and how to identify locally grown food and remove obstacles to buying locally."

Wambles outlined state and federal programs that facilitate farmers

markets, noting that full funding is needed for efforts such as the Farmers Market Nutrition Program that provides coupons that seniors and Women, Infants and Children (WIC) participants can use to purchase fresh produce from farmers or farmers markets.

Although successful farmers' markets require the efforts of legislators and community leaders, they begin in the fields and gardens of growers. For the grower portion of the recipe, Wambles had some advice based on his experiences in Alabama where, with his leadership over the past decade, the number of farmers markets has increased from 17 to 114 with more than 1,500 small family farmers benefitting.

First of all, Wambles emphasized, freshness and quality are the main reasons consumers shop at farmers markets. In addition to filling that need, he advised, growers should find out what consumers visiting farmers markets actually want. Preferred fruits, vegetables and other products may differ from one region to the next, according to local demographics and local preferences, he said.

Additionally, growers may have opportunities to profit from meeting needs that aren't being met. "Pay attention to ethnic groups in your community," he said. "Find out what they want and they'll come to you."

Determining what the community wants, he added, goes beyond what growers bring to market, "it determines what you plant," he said.

Regarding the actual merchandising of products at the farmers market, Wambles stressed that a grower's goal should not be to sell-out quickly. "Strive for steady selling all day," he recommended. "If it's a four-hour market and everything's gone in two hours, people are going to go away disappointed and they might not come back."

Wamble's other tips for growers wanting to make the most of farmers markets included:

- Let your customers get to know you. Consumers like to know the people from whom they buy food, Wamble said. Displaying farm photos in the market booth is one way of helping them accomplish that.

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Sustainable Food System News



Above left, Don Wambles, director of the Alabama Farmers Market Authority, was the keynote speaker at the 2010 Kansas Farmers' Market conference. At right, Pete Garfinkel, explained the new Buy Local Kansas website (see www.buylocalks.com/kansas) and how it links producers and consumers at a workshop. Photos by M. Parker.

Kansas Farmers' Market Conference...

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An attractive sign with a farm name is also very important. "You want people to know who you are," he said.

- Offer variety. It's much more difficult to sell a truckload of one item than it is to sell a variety of products. More products encourage people to shop and spend more time—and money—in your booth. In Wamble's experience, growers who have a variety of products sell more, particularly if those products include "draw crops" such as tomatoes, strawberries or peaches.

- The display is the first thing people see so make sure it is attractive, showcases the products and conveys pride in those products.

- Props such as tablecloths, wicker baskets and apple crates attract buyers and enable the grower to better display

his or her products. Keep displays up off the ground and prop the backs of containers up so that the product is slanted toward the customer. "Remember," Wambles cautioned, "you're not selling a crop, you're selling food."

- As products are sold, switch to smaller and smaller containers as your stock is reduced. "People definitely don't want to buy the last of what you have so you need to convey an image of plenty," Wambles said.

- Salespersons should have a pleasant appearance and pay attention to the customer. Talking on a cell phone is a major annoyance to buyers. Sellers should also keep busy restocking and rearranging whenever there are no customers to wait upon. When there are waiting customers, be sure to acknowledge them so they don't think they're being overlooked. "Body language talks," Wambles noted. "Don't look idle. That's unattractive to buyers."

- Samples, recipes and tastings enhance sales.

- Avoid price wars with other farmers market participants because they hurt everyone. The other vendors at the market should not be seen as competitors because more vendors mean more customers for everyone.

- If you have slack time, it may be an opportunity to add value to your products. Snapping beans or shelling peas, for example, shows activity and draws customers as well as increasing your earning potential.

"Consumers love buying direct from farmers," Wambles observed. "That's something Walmart can't do. (A lot of) stores have tried to mimic the farmers market concept but they don't have the farmer there—that's the key ingredient so make the most of it."

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EQIP Organic Initiative...

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“The important thing is for interested farmers to go to their local conservation district offices and sign up,” continued Fund. “But you have to do it before March 12 for 2010 funding.”

Kansas has received \$1,416,186 for this initiative in 2010. The initiative can provide up to \$20,000 per year for no more than \$80,000 over a six year period to assist farmers and ranchers to transition to organic or to improve conservation benefits on existing organic farms. Funds not allocated in Kansas will be sent back to national headquarters for reallocation.

Eligible farmers include:

- * Farmers just beginning or in the process of transitioning to organic production;
- * Existing certified organic farmers who want to transition additional acres or animals;
- * Existing certified organic farmers who need to adopt additional conservation measures;
- * Producers who sell less than \$5,000 in agricultural products and are thus exempt from formal certification are still eligible for Organic Initiative payments;
- * Farmers whose 2009 applications to the Organic Initiative were deferred will receive a letter from NRCS outlining their options in 2010.

NRCS has developed a list of conservation practices appropriate for organic production offered through the initiative. Kansas’ list is fairly inclusive of all practices including cover crops, conservation crop rotations, grazing management, nutrient management plans, etc.

Successful applications will receive a 75% payment rate for practices undertaken. For beginning, socially disadvantaged, or limited resource farmers, the payment rate will be 90% of practices undertaken.

New to the list of practices eligible for cost-share is the Seasonal High Tunnel System or hoop house system.

New to the EQIP Organic Initiative in 2010 is the addition of the Seasonal High Tunnel System or hoop house conservation practice. Funds are limited to \$4,000 per agricultural operation for a high tunnel. These are plastic covered structures usually for horticultural production. Although there was a sign-up in Kansas earlier this year, the State Conservationist made the decision to run the Seasonal High Tunnel System practice under the Organic Initiative, which establishes the sign up deadline as March 12, 2010.

To apply for the EQIP Organic Initiative, farmers and ranchers must contact their local NRCS office and submit the general EQIP application and a screening criteria worksheet for either “Transition to Organic” or for a “Certified Organic Operation”.

Producers who have not participated in federal farm programs (such as some market garden operations) will need to sign up with their local Farm Services Administration Office to determine eligibility for federal farm programs. Forms are available at the local NRCS office or online. The

important thing is to contact the local county NRCS office and sign up. Details of the application can be developed later.

Farmers already certified organic who are applying must submit a copy of their current organic system plan (OSP) and maintain certification through the length of the EQIP contract. Transitioning organic farmers must certify that they are in the process of obtaining organic certification, and submit a self-certification letter stating that they agree to develop and implement conservation practices for certified organic production consistent with an organic system plan, and that they are working with an organic certifying agency.

State NRCS officials have stated that applications submitted for hoop house funds before the earlier deadline will suffice for the Organic Initiative. Applicants for the high tunnel or hoop house practice however will need to pursue organic certification under the Organic Initiative.

Applications can be submitted at anytime throughout the year, but those submitted before March 12, 2010, will be evaluated in a competitive ranking process this spring.

According to the national NRCS guidance, applications will be treated as two separate ranking pools, one for transitioning farmers and ranchers without any current certified organic production and another for certified organic farmers who need additional conservation practices. Funding is not guaranteed, as EQIP is a competitive program. But the separate EQIP Organic Initiative allows applicants to be ranked against other organic or

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Pharo Steers Graziers...

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That, Pharo added, will maximize the rest period for forages and result in greater production as well as providing the opportunity for more highly productive species to re-establish. Most important, the approach increases total beef production per acre while benefiting the land.

Mimicking wildlife in nature by moving calving to a greener time of year reduces feed and labor expenses, he said, and facilitates a higher percentage of calves born early in the calving season.

"It took God six days to create a

EQIP Organic Initiative...

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transitioning to organic farmers, and not against the much larger pool of all EQIP applicants.

Additional information on the EQIP Organic Initiative and Seasonal High Tunnel Systems can be found at the Kansas Rural Center website at www.kansasruralcenter.org, at the national Alternative Technology Transfer for Rural Areas or ATTRA website at www.attra.ncat.org/eqip, and at www.hightunnels.org.

General information about organic production practices and organic certification are available from ATTRA at www.attra.ncat.org/organic and at the Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service (MOSES) at www.mosesorganic.org/news.html.

For Kansas specific information, contact your local county NRCS office and/or the Kansas Rural Center at 785-873-3431 or ksrc@rainbowtel.net. □

perfect world and we've been trying to improve on it ever since," observed Pharo whose herd calves in May and June. "You can fool Mother Nature but it costs you dollars and labor to do it. If there's a profit to be made doing that, fine, but it really makes more sense to calve when the weather's better and there's better forage for the cows."

The Colorado cattleman admitted to one true disadvantage to later calving. When he moved his calving calendar from April to May, he had more problems with bad udders. "The cows were producing too much milk for the calves," he said. That brought up another of Pharo's observations.

"It bothers me that high milk production is equated with maternal traits. I believe milk is a growth trait but it's an inefficient growth trait. High milk production is inefficient and expensive. Heavy milking cows require more feed for maintenance even when they aren't lactating. ... Fertility and reproduction are the most important maternal traits and high fertility and high milk are actually antagonistic."

Cow type in general should be reconsidered, Pharo said. Noting a direct correlation between cow size and cost of production, he suggested that cows are generally too large and have been selected for producing heavy-weaning calves rather than for the ability to produce a calf and breed back on fewer purchased inputs.

"We can't continue to use the wrong kind of bull to produce the right kind of cows," Pharo challenged. "A rancher wants an efficient 1100-lb. cow that will wean at least 50% of her own weight for many years without being pampered. If that's what you really want, you'd better take a hard look at the bulls you're buying."

Pharo suggested that producers put selection pressure on their cowherds by gradually reducing supplemental feed and increasing the stocking rate. As the environment gets tougher, he said, the more efficient cows will be identified.

"We have to put some selection pressure on these cows," Pharo asserted. "Unless you have an unlimited source for really cheap feed, we can't afford big, inefficient cows. If you have grass that will support 100 1400-lb. cows, that same grass will support 120 1100-lb. cows. With the same forage input, you can have more calves, more pounds of beef, and, since the calves are lighter at weaning, they'll bring more per pound."

Along with managing forages for optimum production, selecting for the right kind of cows is critical to profitable beef production, he emphasized. "Love your wife, forgive your kids and do neither for your cows," he concluded.

The KGA Winter Conference was co-sponsored by the Kansas Rural Center, Kansas Farmers Union, and the Kansas Center for Sustainable Agriculture and the Kansas Grazing Lands Coalition.

The Kansas Graziers Association is a grassroots organization that promotes sustainable grazing practices. For more information, contact Mary Howell by calling 785-562-8726. □ *Mark Parker is a free lance writer and former editor of Farm Talk newspaper in southeast Kansas.*

Clean Water News

Protecting Water Quality...

Continued from page 5

Technical expertise is available from Kansas State University watershed specialists like George and Boyer who can be contacted by email at hgeorge@ksu.edu and wboyer@ksu.edu, respectively.

The Kansas Rural Center's Clean Water Farms Project also offers planning assistance, and county conservation districts have funds to develop alternate water resources. □

Farmers' Market Conference...

Continued from page 9

The Kansas Farmers' Market Conference featured experts addressing a wide variety of topics in about 30 workshops focused on issues such as specialty crop management, marketing, food safety, legislation and licensing.

The Kansas Farmers Market Conference was presented by the Kansas Rural Center's Farmers Market Project with support from a USDA Farmers Market Promotion Program Grant.

Additional sponsors included the Kansas Department of Commerce, Rural Development; the Farmers Market Coalition; the Downtown Lawrence Farmers' Market; and the Kansas Center for Sustainable Agriculture and Alternative Crops. A wealth of related information is available at www.ksfarmersmarkets.org and www.kansasruralcenter.org. □

Resources and Events

OCIA Annual Meeting Set for March 6

The Eastern Kansas Organic Crop Improvement Association (OCIA) will hold its annual meeting Saturday March 6, 2010 at the Netawaka Community Building in Netawaka, Kansas. The meeting will begin with registration at 9:30 a.m. and the morning will be devoted to a business meeting and a report on the EQIP Organic Initiative. The new EQIP program offers transitioning organic farmers and existing organic farmers cost-share assistance to adopt conservation measures to meet organic certification and conservation needs on their farms.

A potluck lunch will be followed by the afternoon program at 1 p.m. featuring Rich Little, UNL organic wheat breeder and Liz Sarno on UNL's organic research.

The Netawaka Community Building is located one-half block south of the water tower in Netawaka, which is 10 miles north of Holton (on U.S. Hwy 75) and one mile east on state Hwy 9.

For more information, contact: Jackie Keller, Eastern Ks. OCIA Executive Secretary at 785-633-4621 or keller7@hotmail.com. □

Rain Barrel and Composting Workshop March 11

The Delaware WRAPS Watershed and Brown County Conservation District are hosting a Rain Barrel and Composting Workshop on March 11, 2010. The workshop will begin at 10:30 a.m. at the Fisher Center at 201 East Iowa Street in Hiawatha, Ks. Cost is \$5.00 per person.

Learn how to make and install a rain barrel and how to make your own compost to improve garden soil. For more information and to register, contact Margaret at 785-742-2012 Ext. 31. Registration fee due by March 9, 2010. □

Grazing Management Teleconference Calls Continue

Join other graziers from across the state of Kansas in a telephone conversation hosted by KRC field staff and featuring grazing and forages experts at 7:30 pm on the second Monday of every month. Hosted by the Kansas Rural Center, these informal discussions will cover all aspects of grazing management.

Who should participate?
Farmers, ranchers and educators.
Anyone who is interested in grazing!

What's the benefit to me?
This is an opportunity to learn how you can use complementary forages to extend your grazing season, gain management tips and explore ideas to improve profitability while you responsibly manage your natural resources.

How do I participate in the call?
Anyone can join in the call by simply dialing in 1-888-387-8686. You will then be prompted to dial in a Conference Room Number. Please dial in 4699043 and follow it with the # sign. This will be a toll free call. You are welcome to leave or join the call at anytime between 7:30 and 9 pm.

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Resources and Events

Grazing Conference Calls...

Continued from page 12

For more information or to receive an email reminder of the call, please contact the Kansas Rural Center at 785-873-3431 or send an email to jason_schmidt20@hotmail.com

Support for this networking opportunity comes from a partnership with the Kansas Department of Health and Environment through U.S. EPA 319 funds. □

Improving Livestock Production Workshop Set for April 13 in Frankfort

A workshop on “Improving Your Livestock Production and Management” will be held Tuesday April 13, 2010, at the Cigna Center, 402 North Maple, Frankfort, Kansas from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m.

The workshop is sponsored by the Tuttle Creek WRAPS, the Middle Kansas WRAPS, Kansas Rural Center, and several county conservation districts and county extension offices, including Marshall and Pottawatomie County Extension offices, and the Jackson County Conservation District. The Cigna Center is located south of the Annunciation Catholic Church in Frankfort.

Presentations will include:

- The Four Seasons of Grazing by Dr. Gary Kilgore, Professor Emeritus KSU;
- Water Development by Will Boyer, KSU Watershed Specialist;
- Wintering, Feeding, Watering Options and Solutions by Dale Kirkham and Jason Schmidt, Kansas Rural Center Clean Water Farm Project field staff;



Brown county farmer Laura Fortmeyer, KRC field staff Ed Reznicek, and Carl Johnson, Missouri WRAPS Coordinator, share information at a recent livestock management workshop sponsored by the Missouri WRAPS Watershed and several county conservation district and extension offices, and KRC. Over 40 livestock producers attended the January workshop that featured Reznicek and Will Boyer, KSU Watershed specialist, outlining how management practices can improve water quality. Doniphan County Conservation District Buffer Coordinator, John Meisenheimer, explained the benefits of installing buffer strips. Mechelle Foos, Doniphan County District Conservationist, discussed cost share programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Don Jones, Water Quality Program Manager, State Conservation Commission (SCC) discussed eligibility for livestock waste management assistance through SCC programs. Dr. Larry Hollis, Extension Beef Veterinarian, Kansas State University, was also on hand to discuss herd health. Look for similar programs to be offered in watersheds in your area (see article on this page about April 13 workshop). Photo by C.Pantle.

-
- What is WRAPS? by Barbara Donovan, Tuttle Creek WRAPS coordinator;
 - and Cattle Herd Health and Profitability by Dr. Larry Hollis, DVM.

A catered supper at \$5 per person will be included; RSVP for the meal count by noon April 12, 2010.

For more information or to register for the meal, contact: Mike Vogt, 785-562-3531 (Marshall County Extension); Glen Brunkow, 785-457-3319 (Pottawatomie County Extension); Roberta Spencer 785-364-4638, (Jackson County Conservation District); or Mary Howell, 785-292-4955 (Kansas Rural Center). □

Renewable Energy Course Offered

Colby Community College is offering a training series to acquaint the participant with the world of alternative energy. Topics covered include wind power -big and small, solar power, geothermal, biofuel/bioenergy and magnetic generation. The class will be held from 7 to 10 p.m. March 15-19, 2010 at the Bedker Memorial Complex, at the SW corner of the campus of Colby Community College in Colby, KS. For more information contact: Tom Moorhous 785-460-5534 or Barry Kaaz 785-460-5429. For more go to www.colbycc.edu/index.php/about-ccc/renewable-energy-initiative. Or go to KRC's website Calendar. □

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Calendar

Monday March 8, 2010, Grazing
Teleconference Call, 7:30 p.m. to 9
p.m. See the KRC website or contact
Jason Schmidt at 864-417-0272 , or at
jason_schmidt20@hotmail.com.

Friday March 12, 2010, U.S.
Department of Justice and USDA
public meeting/workshop on
Competition and concentration in
agriculture. See KRC website at
www.kansasruralcenter.org for more
information.

April 13, 2010, Improving Livestock
Production Workshop, Frankfort, Ks.
Sponsored by Tuttle Creek and
Middle Kansas WRAPS (and others).
Se KRC website, or contact Mary
Howell at 785-292-4955.

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