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NEWS RELEASE –

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LIVESTOCK MANAGEMENT & PROFITABILITY WORKSHOP PROVIDES ANSWERS TO LIVESTOCK PRODUCERS' QUESTIONS

Highland, Kansas—Fighting through the fog and a brief power outage, 43 livestock producers and agency representatives gathered at the Highland Community Center in Highland for a livestock management and profitability workshop in mid-January. The workshop, coordinated by the Missouri River Basin WRAPS (Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategy), provided farmers and ranchers an opportunity to gather information on practices that will improve the profitability of their livestock operation while protecting water quality.

According to Carl Johnson, Missouri River Basin WRAPS coordinator, there are management techniques that make farming operations more profitable as well as efficient and are beneficial to the environment. “As producers, we need to look for wins in all three areas – profitability, efficiency and protecting our resources,” he said.

Ed Reznicek, Clean Water Farms Project (CWFP) Field Organizer, explained the Kansas Rural Center’s CWFP and the River Friendly Farm (RFFP) environmental self assessment that field organizers assist producers in completing. Reznicek explained how the RFFP assists farmers in calculating the animal units on the farm and how that correlates to the available acres for manure application. He then gave examples of pollution prevention practices such as removing the manure from sites where build-up occurs to be applied on crop fields or pasture at the appropriate time. Will Boyer, Watershed Specialist with K-State Research and Extension, answered farmers’ questions regarding water quality regulation. Although Boyer planned to present a slideshow program on livestock management, an hour-long power outage provided the opportunity for a less formal program.

Boyer explained that “State and Federal statutes and rules regarding livestock and water quality vary a lot depending on the type of livestock operation and its location.” He said it seems fairly common for small and medium sized livestock operations to be unaware of their specific responsibilities or to have some misunderstanding.

“The power outage may have been a blessing in disguise—it gave people an opportunity to discuss issues that were foremost on their minds such as regulatory intervention,” Johnson said. Although many events such as flooding and heavy rainfall events occur, Reznicek said producers should still implement best management practices (BMPs) to reduce impacts on the water quality. “Just because we can’t have 100 percent control, 100 percent of the time, doesn’t mean we shouldn’t do anything,” Reznicek explained.

According to Boyer, livestock producers have water quality protection responsibilities and those responsibilities can typically be fulfilled by implementing BMPs. “Small to medium sized operations can usually find practical and economical management alternatives to address any potential concerns,” he said.

One practice that can be implemented to protect water quality is planting grass buffer strips along streams. Doniphan County Conservation District Buffer Coordinator, John Meisenheimer explained the benefits of installing buffer strips. He said the buffer strips “filter out soil, chemicals and fertilizers” as well as provide a wildlife benefit. Although the benefits are numerous, he said he understands that the farmer must ask “How is it going to help me?”

Admittedly, Meisenheimer said he was skeptical when the buffer strips were first introduced. He asked rhetorically, “Why are we going to spend money on a grass filter strip?” Those results are evident when looking at fields with buffer strips in place. Meisenheimer said at the point where field gullies entered the buffer strip the grass was twice as tall as it was elsewhere—proof enough for him that the grass was benefiting from the deposited soil and nutrients that otherwise would enter the creek. In addition, Meisenheimer explained the payments available for implementing buffer strips and various other practices.

Often farmers want to implement BMPs on their farm or ranch, but lack funding to do so. Funding is available for such projects as verified by Mechelle Foos, District Conservationist, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and Don Jones, Water Quality Program Manager, State Conservation Commission (SCC). Foos elaborated on funding programs through NRCS such as the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP), while Jones provided information on cost-share eligibility for livestock waste management through SCC programs.

Another aspect affecting a livestock operation’s bottom-line is often animal health. Therefore, Dr. Larry Hollis, Extension Beef Veterinarian, Kansas State University, was on hand to discuss the occurrence of dystocia in a livestock operation—dystocia is an abnormal or difficult birth. Hollis stressed the importance of delivering a live calf as well as allowing the cow the best opportunity to breed back again.

Hollis recommends watching for these signs as indicators of when to intervene in the birthing process: abnormal presentation; the calf in trouble; the cow quits trying, and the birth is taking too long. In the instance of a breech birth, Hollis said to pull fast as the umbilical cord can be pinched causing lack of oxygen to the calf.

In order to increase the likelihood of the cow breeding back after delivery, Hollis emphasized the importance in cleanliness. He recommends carrying repurposed 1-gallon milk jugs of water on the floor board of your pickup. “The heater in your truck can do a lot to warm that water up,” he said. Then it can be used for hand washing—along with soap—as well as rinsing off the cow before she delivers a calf.

“The presenters at the workshop discussed management practices that are both good for our bottom-line and good for our watershed. I think that is what all of the citizens want,” Johnson said. “I hope there was a message that keeping the animal waste and fertilizers out of the streams in the watershed as well as reducing erosion is not just an environmental issue but it is a waste of valuable resources we that need on our farms.”

The workshop was sponsored by Missouri River Basin WRAPS; Troy State Bank; John Haupt, Troy Insurance Services, Inc.; Bruna Implement; State Conservation Commission, Kansas State University Research and Extension; Brown, Doniphan, Leavenworth, Nemaha and Wyandotte County Conservation Districts, and Kansas Rural Center.