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NEWS RELEASE –

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### **WORKSHOP IN TONGANOXIE HIGHLIGHTS BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES FOR WINTER FEEDING AREAS**

*Tonganoxie, Kansas*—“Are you raising cattle for pleasure or profit...or both?” Dale Kirkham, Field Organizer with the Kansas Rural Center’s Clean Water Farms Project, posed this question to those attending a “Best Management Practices for Winter Feeding Areas” workshop in Tonganoxie in mid-February. “If you are in it for pleasure—you are not going to be in it for long,” he said.

“Feed prices have gone up and it is more and more important to have efficient cows,” he said. Kirkham urges farmers to “select for cattle that will do well on a grass or forage diet.”

One way Kirkham said he increases the profit of his herd is selecting for cow size and feed efficiency. An optimal cow in Kirkham’s herd will wean a calf at 50 percent of her body weight while utilizing forages.

“You don’t have to babysit those cows,” Kirkham said. “You want mother nature to help you select those cattle that will live on forage.” He explained he checks the heifers and the ones who are not pregnant are sold. He said if he sells at that time, he is able to receive a good price for them instead of waiting to sell them later as a cull.

Kirkham also provided a few management tips including: supplementing with a protein source two to three times per week; feeding at different times of the day and entering through a different gate (cattle are creatures of habit and this will keep them out grazing instead of waiting on you at the gate, he explained), and feed in least used sites in pasture to encourage grazing in that area.

Kirkham explained that having cattle on pasture through out the winter instead of in a confined area spreads manure out across the landscape and creates a positive impact on water quality. Feeding a small amount of cracked corn or corn to the cows encourages birds to break down manure piles and spread the nutrients out even further, he said.

The workshop, organized through the Lower Kansas WRAPS (Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategy) by the Leavenworth County Conservation District and the Kansas Rural Center, featured topics related to implementing best management practices (BMPs) that allow farmers and ranchers to reduce input costs and protect water quality.

Another topic of discussion included reducing hay feeding waste. Jody Holthaus, Livestock/Natural Resources District Agent with K-State Research and Extension’s Meadowlark District, spoke on the importance of reducing hay loss.

According to Holthaus, 50 percent of hay is lost through storage or wasted during feeding. She said hay is a large expense. “Haying requires a large investment in equipment, plus the time and labor to put up,” she said.

Holthaus said loss can be reduced by using proper storage techniques, which allow moisture to drain out and away from the bales as quickly as possible. She suggests north to south rows (with at least six feet in between rows) on a sloped site, away from tree lines or buildings.

Carol Blocksome, Kansas State University, explained the results of a recent grazed riparian buffer demonstration project. Riparian buffer strips filter runoff and decrease runoff velocity reducing erosion. According to Blocksome, the implementation of the buffers encountered some resistance from producers. This resistance was partially attributed to the

exclusion of grazing corn residue adjacent to the buffers. She said the Jackson County Conservation District relayed this concern and she in turn conducted the study on one Jackson County farm and two Nemaha County farms. Blocksome concluded that the riparian buffers are unaffected if the cattle are provided an alternative shelter away from the buffer (all buffers in the study had existing alternative water sources away from the creeks in question).

Will Boyer, Watershed Specialist, K-State Research and Extension, said, "Everyone contributes to water pollution." Specific causes of pollution include: failing septic systems; runoff from crop, grazing and feedlots; storm water runoff, and wildlife.

The key is to reduce the amount of pollution in streams and creeks. Boyer explained there are three things cattle need—feed, water and shelter. He showed the producers a photograph of a farm with all of these necessities along a creek. "Move one or more of these things away from the creek," Boyer said. This encourages the animals to spend some of their time away from the creek instead of being by it 100 percent of the time, he said.

Mud is a concern related to confined feeding operation. Boyer stressed that mud is detrimental to a calf's performance. "Your bottom line is affected by having animals down in wet, mucky mud," he said. He said there is a huge loss cattle gain when they are attempting to move around in mud. Other benefits of an alternative feeding site include: animal well-being and a reduction in stable-fly production.

An alternative feeding site—one that is away from creeks and ditches—can also include a windbreak. A man-made windbreak with four inches between the tin or boards is shown to be most effective, Boyer said. "This makes a better windbreak as a solid windbreak causes a back wind toward the cattle," he said.

Boyer suggests a managed "sacrifice area" to feed your cattle during the winter to protect other areas of the pasture. This might include a hard surface such as geo-textile fabric below a lime and rock base. Boyer said this is often installed for one-third the cost of concrete.

In addition, Boyer said it is important to provide an alternative watering source as well— an alternate to unmanaged access to streams and ponds. "Cattle perform better with an abundant and reliable livestock water source," he said. Boyer also said an alternative water source reduces chopping ice in the winter and provides the herd with a clean, reliable source of fresh water. He said studies show cattle prefer a water temperature of 60 to 80 degrees.

According to Boyer, there is technical assistance available for many of these management practices and encouraged livestock producers to seek out assistance for these projects.

"Not only did the producers ask questions of the presenters, but several conversations and discussions were generated among the audience," Jerry Wooley, Leavenworth County Conservation District Buffer Coordinator, said. "There were a number that resulted in ideas and information exchanges through out the day."

Residents of the Stranger Creek Watershed were eligible for "door prizes" to help the producers implement BMPs on their own farm. Those prizes awarded included: 150 feet of geo-textile fabric plus gravel; 150 feet of geo-textile fabric; an alternative watering site tank with fabric, and two \$500 credits to be used toward implementing an approved BMP.

"It appeared that many left with a greater knowledge of the programs that are available and a desire to become more informed," Wooley said.

Sponsors of the workshop are Frontier Farm Credit; Leavenworth County Beef Improvement Association (BIA); Leavenworth County Fair Board; Leavenworth County Cooperative Association; Leavenworth County Farm Bureau; K-State Research and Extension; Kansas Alliance for Wetlands and Streams (KAWS); State Conservation Commission (SCC); Kansas Department of Health and Environment(KDHE); Leavenworth County Conservation District and the Kansas Rural Center.