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NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **LOW COST TIPS FOR LIVESTOCK MANAGEMENT**

By Connie Pantle

*Tonganoxie, Kans.*—"As cattlemen, we probably spoil our cattle—they have four legs and a rumen for a reason," stated Dale Kirkham, field organizer with the Kansas Rural Center (KRC) at a recent livestock management workshop in Tonganoxie. Kirkham explained that cattle "should work for us instead of us working for them."

Organized by the Leavenworth County Conservation District and KRC for the Lower Kansas WRAPS Watershed, the workshop offered tips to livestock producers on optimizing land and management resources.

By adopting simple management practices, Kirkham said the cattle will spend more time grazing and less time waiting for you by the gate. He suggests feeding at different times of the day and entering from different gates. Additionally, feed in least used sites in pasture to improve grazing distribution.

Kirkham said it is important to monitor pastures. Using exclusion areas—typically a cattle panel cage—he said producers can visualize how much grass was utilized. "It is important to remember the rule-of-thumb: 'take half—leave half'," he said. He also encouraged producers to monitor grass stands year-to-year by taking photos in same location of pasture. "Mark a location using a disc blade and take a picture facing the same direction each year," he said.

A good clean water source is an important aspect of any operation, according to Kirkham. "Cattle will drink more water if it is clean. And the more water they'll drink, the more they'll eat and the better they'll perform," he said. Kirkham encourages producers to "look for practical solutions" to water their cattle. He said this may include rehabilitating an existing windmill or installing a below-the-pond waterer.

Will Boyer, watershed specialist with K-State Research and Extension, also stated that the watering location is the number one factor in grazing distribution. "When you improve grazing distribution, you also improve waste and nutrient distribution," he said.

To maximize forage utilization, Boyer suggests cross fencing a larger pasture into individual paddocks. When using a rotational grazing method, Boyer said water is the top priority. He suggests a variety of methods for getting water to all paddocks including a fenced pond with a waterer; solar powered pumping system; wet well; siphon supply line; or even hauling water. Boyer also showed illustrations of fence design with alleyways to provide access to a watering point.

Another point to consider in maximizing grazing distribution is the mineral feeder location. Boyer said placing it in the least used location in the pasture encourages grazing in that area, which also provides an opportunity for manure distribution.

Gary Kilgore, professor emeritus K-State Research and Extension, offered ways to extend the grazing season which in turn reduces input costs for producers. Kilgore stressed that forages must meet the needs of the grazing animal as well as the individual producer. "Select forages best adapted to your farm's soil and climate conditions," he said.

In order to meet those needs throughout the calendar year, he suggests lining up different forages including both warm and cool season grasses as well as annuals and perennials. "Use a forage calendar and match it to your system," he said.

Kilgore said fescue can play a role in extending the grazing season through winter. "Everybody ought to have some," he said. Fescue can be stockpiled and strip grazed as late as February. Kilgore said the simplest form of strip grazing uses electric fence and allows the cattle access to an amount of fescue—whatever matches the producer's management.

While many producers have an aversion to fescue because of the toxicity of the endophytes, Kilgore suggests testing fescue to see what percent is infected. He said a producer can seek a local K-State Research and Extension agent to assist with testing of fescue—which is inexpensive.

Another alternative to traditional fescue is using a friendly-endophyte fescue variety such as Max Q. Kilgore said the return is high on the investment of planting Max Q as it increases production dramatically. "Animal performance is the key in all of this," he said.

Kilgore said that using a variety of forages and cover crops is not only beneficial for extending the grazing season, but it also limits erosion. "The best way to improve water quality is to keep something on the ground that will keep the soil in place," he said.

Jason Schmidt, KRC field organizer; Jerry Wooley, special project manager, Leavenworth County Conservation District, and William Beck, watershed forester, Kansas Forest Service, elaborated on technical and financial assistance available to producers in the watershed. These services are available through a

variety of sources including: Lower Kansas WRAPS; Kansas Forest Service; KRC; Leavenworth County Conservation District, and K-State Research and Extension.

Schmidt also added that KRC sponsors a free monthly grazing management tele-conference call. The call allows livestock producers to discuss forage issues with Kirkham, Kilgore and other graziers. For more information on the free grazing teleconference call, see the KRC calendar page at:

<http://www.kansasruralcenter.org/calendar.html>

Sponsors of the workshop included Lower Kansas WRAPS; Kansas Forest Service; Kansas Rural Center; Leavenworth County Conservation District, and K-State Research and Extension. Partial funding for the workshop came from the Kansas Department of Health and Environment via U.S. EPA Non-point Funds -30-