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NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Livestock Management Workshop: Improvements Don't Have to Be Expensive

By Connie Pantle

"Cows have four legs and a rumen for a reason," Dale Kirkham, field organizer with the Kansas Rural Center, said. "They are not adapted to standing in the mud or with their head in a hay ring."

Kirkham presented at a recent Livestock Management Workshop in Tonganoxie. The workshop targeted producers operating in the Nine Mile Creek Watershed and the surrounding area. The Nine Mile Creek watershed begins near McLouth and drains into Stranger Creek near Linwood.

The workshop—hosted by the Leavenworth County Conservation District and the Kansas Alliance for Wetlands and Streams (KAWS)—focused on ways that livestock producers can improve the water quality on his or her operation all while maximizing inputs. A similar workshop occurred in McLouth the previous week.

Kirkham further explained the cow has four basic functions—to harvest forage; have a calf every year; recycle nutrients, and provide profit. He said by implementing certain management techniques, livestock producers could maximize their resources and minimize their inputs—all in order to maximize their profits.

Livestock producers can maximize their resources by keeping these five goals in mind: improve grazing efficiency; utilization of legumes for forage and nitrogen; retain water and nutrients on land; extending the grazing season (and use less hay), and create positive impacts—and reduce negative impacts.

According to Kirkham, monitoring pastures is an important management technique to improve grazing efficiency. He said an operator should ask: "Did we take half, and leave half?" He also suggested using simple rotations in a grazing system to improve the stand of available forage, which in turn reduces the need to feed hay.

The real advantage of rotating cattle to different pastures—or fenced sections of one pasture—is to give those grasses, forbs and legumes a rest, he said. "More pastures are under-rested than are over-grazed," he said. He explained that rest period is what allows grass to regrow. "Pastures can recover from overgrazing if they have rest."

Will Boyer, watershed specialist with K-State Research and Extension encouraged producers to think about alternative livestock feeding sites, especially over the winter. There are three things—water, feed, and shelter—that cattle seek during the winter months. Boyer said by moving at least one of these, either the water or the feed, out of the creek bottom can produce a positive impact.

In addition, he suggested implementing a managed sacrifice area, which is “a hard surface to protect pasture during wet, muddy times.” He said feed pads, constructed with geo-textile fabric, provide a dry place to feed hay. “The fabric provides a separation between rock and mud, which keeps the rock from disappearing into the mud,” he said. This is also an effective technique around waterers and feed bunks.

Boyer also addressed alternative watering sites, which provide another source of water other than ponds or streams. Effective alternative waterers include tanks below the pond dam, tire tanks, or solar systems. “Sometimes hauling water pencils out,” he said. “Don’t think that an alternative watering system has to be expensive,” he said.

He said keeping cattle out of streams and ponds reduces erosion and protects the life of the body of water. “Our ponds are a great resource and we ought to take good care of them,” he said.

Don Jones, water quality program manager, Kansas Department of Agriculture, Division of Conservation, explained funding programs, which are delivered by local conservation districts. He said local producers should contact their local conservation district office to “help you determine what programs work best.”

Kansas Forest Service District Forester Dave Bruton, addressed the benefits of riparian forests and how they fit within a farming operation. He said that riparian forests could provide a source for “marketable timber”. A multi-stage transition planting between cropland and riparian areas keeps trees back from implements and includes a natural filter to improve the water quality in creeks. He said the planting could include grasses and shrubs between the crops and forest. He also explained cost-share is available through your local conservation district for riparian and wildlife enhancements.

In addition, Bruton advised landowners to have a hands-on approach to their forests. “If you have woodlands, spend one day in the woods,” he said. Bruton suggested picking up walnuts or acorns and distributing them in sites with open sky above to encourage diversity. He demonstrated a tool, the Nut Wizard, which allows the user to easily pick up nuts so they can redistribute within their woodland area.

Ed Reznicek, KRC field organizer, explained the River Friendly Farms environmental self-assessment and how it can be applied to a farming operation. Reznicek said the assessment helps you evaluate and score your farm. “It allows you to play the hand you are dealt,” he said. “Each farm is unique and it points out the strengths and weaknesses of each operation.” A \$250 stipend is available for producers in certain watersheds completing the assessment. Contact the Kansas Rural Center at 785-873-3431 for more information.

Leavenworth County Conservation District Buffer Coordinator Jerry Wooley added that cost-share may be available for producers in Leavenworth County. For more information on the Lower Kansas WRAPS or funding available within the watershed, contact Wooley at 913-682-2133.

The free workshop was sponsored by the Leavenworth County Conservation District; KAWS; Lower Kansas WRAPS; Kansas Rural Center; Kansas Department of Agriculture Department of Conservation; K-State Research and Extension, and the Kansas Forest Service. -30-