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Drought Proofing our Soils: The Benefits of Cover Crops and Profiting from Streamside Trees

“How can cover crops increase my cattle and crop profits?” “Is dairy quality forage for \$10 per ton possible?” “How can I turn that waste area down by the creek into long-term cash from timber and wildlife value?”

The Middle Kansas River Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategy (WRAPS), along with the Kansas Forest Service (KFS) and the Kansas Rural Center will be hosting a FREE workshop on October 17 From 1 p.m. to approximately 5:30 p.m. in Westmoreland, KS that will answer important questions like these. The workshop will take place in the Sunflower Room, located within the Pottawatomie County Building in Westmoreland, KS (612 Campbell Street). Refreshments and snacks will be provided for event attendees.

The workshop will include a wide variety of talks and hands-on activities aimed at informing producers and landowners about how both cover crops and streamside trees can impact their bottom line.

John Bond, coordinator of the Middle Kansas River WRAPS group will kick things off at 1pm with a welcome and overview of the WRAPS project. Presentations from Thad Rhodes and Billy Beck (both Kansas Forest Service watershed foresters) will follow, running from 1:15pm to around 2:45pm. Beck and Rhodes will cover a wide variety of forestry topics including: streamside timber establishment, forest management for wildlife, low cost stream bank stabilization methods, and funding/cost share for streamside forestry practices.

“There can be a lot of skepticism associated with tree planting in the Midwest”, says Beck, “however, one goal of this workshop is to show producers that establishing streamside tree

plantings can be a successful, rewarding, and profitable endeavor – and there is abundant cost share out there to get you going.”

Following forestry, Dale Strickler of Star Seed (Osbourne, KS) will share his extensive knowledge of cover crops and their year-round use to increase cattle and crop profits. Strickler, a K-State alum, experienced agronomist, college instructor, farmer, and rancher, states “Our current system of feeding hay to cattle has become rapidly cost prohibitive as hay prices have skyrocketed under drought conditions. As producers seek alternatives to traditional hay feeding, they are increasingly discovering a method to reduce hay needs that not only produces better animal performance but also has a side benefit of also amazingly increasing crop yields. This no-longer-well-kept secret is the grazing of cover crops, an age old but little used method until recently.”

“ Intelligently selected and managed cover crops can provide an impressive amount of grazing during the traditional hay feeding period, while at the same time fixing nitrogen, generating water saving mulches, improving soil organic matter and tilth, and deepening the root zone, all features that increase subsequent crop yields. In short, grazing cover crops can generate more income at less cost!”

Dale’s talk will cover relevant topics such as: why eliminating hay feeding is the key to cattle profits, why cover crops can increase yields of subsequent crops, and how to select cover crops to provide grazing when you need it. Dale’s talk will wrap up around 4:45pm. Following Dale, Middle Kansas WRAPS coordinator John Bond will provide information on available cost share that can help to make streamside forestry and cover crop projects a reality for producers.

All presenters plus WRAPS representatives will be available for one-on-one chats for a brief period following the event. Landowners and producers interested in enhancing both water quality and their bottom line through sustainable streamside forestry and cover crops will definitely benefit from the October 17 Cover Crop and Streamside Forestry Workshop! Please RSVP for this free event by Tuesday, October 16 (to ensure a proper amount of snacks and refreshments) to Billy Beck, Kansas Forest Service, by calling (785) 532-3308, or by email at wjbeck@k-state.edu. ###