69th Annual Meeting and Dinner

Thursday, February 11, 2016
Cowley County farmers and ranchers will be recognized by the Kansas Banker’s Association for implementation of sound conservation practices for cropland, grazing lands and water quality. Steve Russell, Cowley County Key Banker, Community National Bank, will present Conservation Awards to Lawrence Rippe and Randall Rippe, Rippe Farms. These awards are given to producers who have implemented conservation practices on their cropland. Practices include terraces, waterways, rock chutes, erosion control dams, turf reinforcement mats, etc.

The Conservation District will present the Rangeland Management Award to Neil Kadau, Kadau Farms for excellence in range and pasture management. Other awards will be presented to the county’s KACD poster contest winners.

The meal will be sponsored by the banks of Cowley County. Local entertainment will be sponsored by the Cowley County Conservation District. Reservations are required and may be made through February 5, 2016 by calling the Conservation District office at 620-221-1850 extension 3, or emailing Amanda Scott at: amanda.f.scott@ks.nacdnet.net.

Annual Meeting
Thursday, February 11, 2016
Registration—6:00
Dinner—6:30
Baden Square—Winfield, KS
RSVP by February 5, 2016

Planting Dates

**Cool Season**
Brome, Fescue -
Aug 15 - Oct 1
Dec 1 - April 15

Legumes -
Aug 15 - Sept 10

**Warm Season**
Native -
Dec 1 - May 15 Maximum
Mar 15 - May 15 Optimum

Bermuda -
Mar 1 - June 1

Legumes -
Feb 15 - May 15
Managing the “Green” when Markets are Down

Doug Spencer, Rangeland Management Specialist, NRCS

Have you ever heard the phrase, “You can’t starve a profit out of a cow?” The same phrase rings true for the forage base those livestock are grazing. Stated a little different, “You can’t overgraze and expect more forage.” When margins are tight, it’s often easy for producers to begin burdening the forage base by increasing livestock demand above sustainable levels. Remembering some key points regarding grazing management will help us not lose focus in our grassland management.

The first point is that it takes leaves to grow leaves. Green, growing leaves are the solar panels of plants. In order for energy to enter the system and produce more green leaves, leaf material must remain after grazing. Perennial grasses are amazing in their ability to persist with long-term variations in weather, grazing, and fire. As amazing as they are, however, I’ve yet to find one that can consistently have all the leaves removed and keep producing larger and healthier leaves. Remaining leaf material that’s required will vary with regard to the forage type. A general rule of thumb is that cool-season forages such as smooth brome and tall fescue should maintain a leaf height of 3 to 4” or more. Warm-season forages such as the dominant grasses found in the tallgrass prairie should maintain a leaf height of 5 to 6” or more. How much leaf are you leaving as part of your grazing plan?

I know what you are thinking, “But my cows eat some grass down to the ground and don’t graze others at all.” That leads to the second point that cows are selective grazers or picky eaters. Just like my nine year old son will pick an ice cream shake over a head of broccoli any day of the week, a cow will selectively graze forage types. At the same time, my son will also choose an ice cream shake freshly made over one that was left in the car overnight that is melted and warm. A cow readily grazes big bluestem when it’s new and leafy growth, but as the season progresses or the plant has reproductive stems present, she’ll look for something with more nutrition. Our goal as managers is to recognize this and manage for it. Utilizing grazing systems with variations in stock density, prescribed burning with variations in timing, or a combination of both are options for producers. A little ranch dressing goes a long way to get my son to eat broccoli. What management strategy can you implement to get a few more nutritious bites out of a lesser preferred plant? Will that same strategy also allow fewer bites of a highly preferred plant so it remains healthy?

The third and final point is that grasses respond to rest. I’ve heard some producers who state that they graze the pasture for six months and they rest the pasture six months. That sounds great until you realize the rest is only during the dormant season. That’d be comparable to a boss crediting an employee with more time off when the employee was already off work. Designing a grazing system that allows rest for the selectively grazed plants can greatly improve their vigor. Rest allows plants to regain leaf material that was removed by grazing. The increased energy captured from the increased leaf area will in turn increase carbohydrate storage for new leaf and root growth. The amount of rest needed for a grazed plant can vary. Factors such as severity of leaf removal, length of growing season left, and available soil moisture will dictate the amount of rest needed. Rest periods can range from weeks to months to over a year depending on these factors listed. Where are opportunities for you to integrate growing season rest into your grazing management?

While the “green” that’s used to pay the bills is important, don’t forget that it takes the healthy, green leaves in the pasture to make that happen. Focusing management on solar energy capture is key in this business. If you don’t capture it there, the only other means of bringing it in is by purchasing it. If you need management ideas on growing forages, improving utilization of forages, or designing grazing systems that allow rest and recovery periods, contact your local Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office.
The Conservation District Has Just What You Need!

For Rent:

10ft. Great Plains Grass Drills
$8.50/acre (In-County) - $85.00 minimum
$10.00/acre (Out-of-County) - $100.00 minimum

8ft. Truax Drill
$8.50/acre (In-County) - $85.00 minimum
$10.00/acre (Out-of-County) - $100.00 minimum

Bermuda Grass Sprigger
$10.00/acre

Drip Torch or Fire Swatter Flap
$5.00/day

Prescribed Burn Signs
$10.00/day

TRM Stapler
$30.00/project

The Conservation District also has a Root Plow for use at No Charge.

In addition to equipment you can purchase the following at the office:

Grass Seed, Marking Flags, Geotextile, Turf Reinforcement Mat and Staples

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Soil Health

Even after having such a wet spring, some crops showed signs of distress during a dry stretch of the summer. What if it were possible to increase the amount of rain your soil can absorb in a shorter time frame? What if that moisture in the soil would then stay in the soil until your crops could utilize it without losing any of it to evaporation in the heat of the summer? This is all possible with not a new management practice, but with a very old one: cover crops.

NRCS Conservation Agronomist Ray Archuleta once said, “Soil without biology is geology.” Healthy soils are full of microorganisms that have the same needs as other living creatures. They need food and cover to survive. When you have a diverse vegetative cover on the soil, especially in living cover, you provide food and cover for the microorganisms beneath the soil. With their life and death, they cycle nutrients and build the soil and give it structure. This is all involved in the organic matter of the soil.

The more organic matter you have in the soil, the more productive your soil can be. The carbon in organic matter is the main source of energy for all-important soil microbes and is the key to making nutrients available to plants. Organic matter supplies, stores, and retains such nutrients as nitrogen, phosphorus, and sulfur. Soil properties influenced by organic matter can increase water infiltration rates and increase the ability to store water, soil structure, and soil organisms. The cover on top of the soil can insulate the soil to keep it cooler in the summer to reduce the amount of water lost to evaporation. One percent of organic matter in the top six inches of the soil can hold approximately 27,000 gallons of water per acre.

Cover crops, green manure, perennial forage crops, compost and manure all add organic matter. Along with all of these, reducing tillage, planting as many different species in your rotations, and planting diverse mixtures of cover crops that keep the soil covered with residue year round will improve soil health.

In conclusion, the healthier you would like your soil to be, the less bare soil you should see on your fields. Consider keeping your soil covered. For more information, contact your local Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) office or conservation district.
Gear Up for Cost-Share, NOW!

Jess Biddle, Soil Conservation Technician

Every year producers experience some type of soil erosion and will be in need of conservation practices. In order for these practices to get done in a timely manner, it takes considerable planning, especially if cost-share money is requested. Gone are the days of walking into the conservation office and requesting cost-share money for practices on the spur of the moment. Cost-share money is harder to get than ever, due to government cutbacks and changing programs.

Many things may be involved as you consider what practices are needed for your land. From the time you realize there are problems on your land, it will take considerable time, effort and decision-making to realize the end product. Together we need to make field visits, discuss different ideas and options about ways to overcome the problems you might have. Then, when decisions are made, the actual surveying and designing of the practices occurs. Once this is done, more decision making is necessary: Are these practices designed to meet your expectations? Do they fit in with the rest of your farming operations? How much will it cost? When can the work be done? All of these detail questions, their answers and subsequent decision-making can add up to substantial time invested.

Producers who plan ahead will be able to take better advantage of cost-share opportunities when they arise. I challenge you to plan ahead. So don’t wait—start planning NOW!

(Editor’s note—Cowley County Conservation District holds a six week state cost-share sign-up March 1 - April 15. Watch for additional news in the local papers, on our website and in our newsletter.)

Conservation is a state of harmony between men and land. Aldo Leopold (American Ecologist, 1887-1948)