

Kansas Farm Bureau secures Pinnacle award

For an unprecedented third consecutive year, Kansas Farm Bureau has earned the highest recognition from the American Farm Bureau Federation.

The Pinnacle Award honors outstanding program achievement combined with membership growth. The award was announced and presented during this week's 2011 annual convention in Atlanta.

"This award honors the best of the best," said Ottawa County farmer Steve Baccus, who serves as president of Kansas Farm Bureau. "To be recognized for a third year in a row is a tremendous honor. The credit goes directly to our dedicated grassroots members, the commitment of our 105 county boards and our talented professional staff."

In a world, country and state where rural voices are now a distinct minority, the hard work exemplified by the Pinnacle Award has never been more important.

Kansas Farm Bureau earned the honor by standing up for farm families in public policy debates at the Statehouse and the courthouse and by reaching those who lack a direct connection with agriculture and rural living through education, awareness and promotion.

In addition to earning its third consecutive Pinnacle Award, Kansas Farm Bureau was honored with five Awards of Excellence and a pair of President's Awards for rural advocacy work done in agriculture education and promotion, leadership development, member services, policy implementation and

public relations/information.

Two Kansas county Farm Bureau organizations were among 15 nationwide honored in Atlanta for innovative programs. The Kingman County Farm Bureau brought together 21 county bureaus to establish a permanent agriculture exhibit, "Agmagination," at Exploration Place, a Wichita science and discovery center.

Barton County Farm Bureau developed and implemented a voluntary safety program aimed at saving lives and livestock. Working with law enforcement dispatchers, livestock owners are quickly notified should livestock stray from pastures.

Many Conservation Reserve Program acres to expire

By Matt Smith

Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks

HAYS — As of 2009, Kansas had just over three million acres enrolled in the federal Conservation Reserve Program.

Established in 1985 to protect highly erodible and other environmentally-sensitive lands, the program has created valuable habitat for many species of wildlife, including popular game species such as pheasants, bobwhite quail and prairie-chickens.

By mid-year, over one-half of the contracts in Kansas will have expired. Due to a national cutback, some of these expiring acres will not qualify for re-enrollment. When a contract ex-

pires, landowners are faced with management decisions that will affect wildlife populations, water quality, soil erosion, and income producing opportunities.

The basic alternatives include returning all or part of the land to crop production, retaining the vegetation for livestock or forage production, using the land for recreational purposes such as hunting, or enrolling at least parts of the land into other conservation programs or some combination of these. Economics will generally determine land use decisions, and each alternative will need careful consideration. The real estate value of rural land with good wildlife habitat is increasing as many buyers look for opportunities for outdoor ac-

tivities.

Most land enrolled in the program was highly erodible and difficult to farm. Returning such land to crop production requires meeting highly erodible land conservation compliance rules to retain eligibility for U.S. Department of Agriculture commodity or conservation programs.

Landowners should consider "farming the best and leaving the rest" if the land is returned to crop production. Fortunately, the continuous program can help landowners do exactly that. Marginal lands with the least potential for profitable farming may be eligible for payments through the continuous program and therefore could be maintained as permanent vegetation and left for wildlife. The program practices can diversify farm income and maintain the environmental benefits achieved.

Under the continuous program, the Farm Service Agency may enroll eligible land devoted to certain conservation practices at any time. The FSA accepts qualified offers without a bid process. The contracts are for 10-to-15 years and may pay an enhanced rental rate.

Careful planning before breaking out grassland will help maintain critical habitat for wildlife and provide other environmental benefits. Areas around streams and other water bodies can be protected with filterstrips.

Wetlands within cropland may be eligible for protection and restoration providing valuable habitat for waterfowl and pheasants using continuous practices. Practices devoted

to creating habitat for wildlife include habitat buffers for upland birds and state acres for wildlife enhancement. These and others may give landowners financial incentives to maintain nesting, brood rearing, travel corridors and winter cover that is often lacking within intensively farmed areas.

By combining multiple practices on the same field, it may be possible to maximize re-enrolled acres on land with expiring contracts. Landowners should contact their local Natural Resources Conservation Service office for planning assistance.

Ranching and wildlife management are generally very compatible. Good rangeland management and good wildlife management, go hand in hand, especially for prairie chickens. Because Conservation Reserve land was formerly cropped, adequate fencing and water sources are often lacking. Landowners who want to use expired acres for livestock production should check with the conservation office about the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, which offer cost-share funding for cross-fencing, watering facilities, controlling invasive trees, managed grazing, and prescribed burning on eligible land. Landowners with an interest in improving habitat for wildlife can contact their local wildlife biologist and check on cost-share opportunities and planning assistance through the habitat program and Wildlife and Park's Landowner Incentive Program.



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