

# No till, cover crops save water

By Vera Sloan

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Life has taken a totally different turn for Randy Regier since he graduated from Oakley High School in 1987.

As an 18-year-old going off to college, he recalled, he told his father, Hank Regier, a long-time Thomas County farmer, that he was determined to find something else to do.

"My dad said that was fine, and there'd be no pressure from him for me to come back to the farm," he said, "so I went to school, got married, and during college, I took a job."

But things have a way of changing. The young man who was determined to find something to do besides farm will be honored Jan. 23 when he receives the 2011 Kansas Bankers Association Soil Conservation Award for Thomas County. The award is presented to an operator who has exhibited good farming practices, and who has gone over and above the norm to improve and conserve the soil.

"It didn't take me long to learn, after three years of working eight to five for someone else, that it was helping them a whole lot more than it was helping me," he said with a chuckle, "so I talked to my dad to see if we couldn't work something out."

In 1991, Regier returned to the family farm 11 miles south of Colby to help his dad with



Randy Regier with his wife Melissa farm south of Colby in Thomas County.

the dryland and irrigated farm. They added cattle to the operation to supplement their income.

He said when the cattle market took a down-

turn in 1994, he headed for town to work for Tri-County Implement of Oakley until 1997.

"Dad retired that year," he said, "and I took over what he was doing, plus picked up some more ground to rent."

Today Randy and his wife Melissa farm 5,000 acres of dryland and irrigated crops in four counties, Thomas, Rawlins, Cheyenne and Sheridan. There's no time for cattle.

The Regiers have basically been using the no-till practices since 1997 and used minimum till before that. He sprays wheat stubble and follows it with corn. However, he said, he still finds need for a little tillage from time to time as weeds start to resist glyphosate. He uses strip-till technology on irrigated acres.

Regier says he watches how much cover is left on the fields. The more residue that's left, the better.

"We're also careful where the ground is terraced," he said, "because we want the terraces to maintain their shape ... for where we might get that sudden six-inch rain."

Regier said he began using cover crops recently by planting two bushels of peas to the acre mixed in with about three bushel of oats, using a 7 1/2-inch spacing no-till drill.

He said he's been working with Sen. Jerry Moran to help get an extension on the time cover crops have to be destroyed to meet regulations of the federal Farm Program. Current regulations say growing cover must be

destroyed by the end May.

"If it's not destroyed by that date, the government classifies it as continuous cropping," he said, "but it would actually be better for it to stay until the end of June in order for the soil get the full benefit of the nitrogen from the peas."

"The Natural Resources Conservation Service says cover crops are beneficial to farming conservation, but the Farm Services Agency penalizes us if it's not destroyed the end of May."

He added that some farmers are satisfied with things the way they are.

Regier says cover crops have two benefits for him. Last spring, his ground required two less sprayings for broad-leaf weeds, he said, and there's the benefit of the nitrogen from the peas in fields where he allowed them to grow past the May 31 deadline.

"It was Servi Tech that sold me on using liquid nitrogen in place of anhydrous ammonia fertilizer," he said, "and I have more organic matter now."

"The third year after switching from anhydrous ammonia to liquid nitrogen, my dad and I dug down in the soil, and found earthworms working and making channels. I was convinced. That just doesn't happen with anhydrous."

Regier, who irrigates with nine pivots, says he feels especially blessed here because of

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