

The
Goodland Star-News
Presents
Conservation Edition 2012

February 3, 2012



Bankers Award: William and Diane Gattshall
Windbreak Award: Lawrence and Helen Musil
Friend of Agriculture Award: Jim Strine
State Runner-Up Limerick: Kaitlen Thompson

Awards Banquet: 6:30 p.m. Monday, Feb. 6, Veterans of Foreign Wars Hall

Terraces, no-till practices earn Bankers Award

By Kevin Bottrell

kbottrell@nwkansas.com

The winners of this year's Sherman County Conservation District Bankers Award are William and Diane Gattshall, who live and farm in northwest Sherman County.

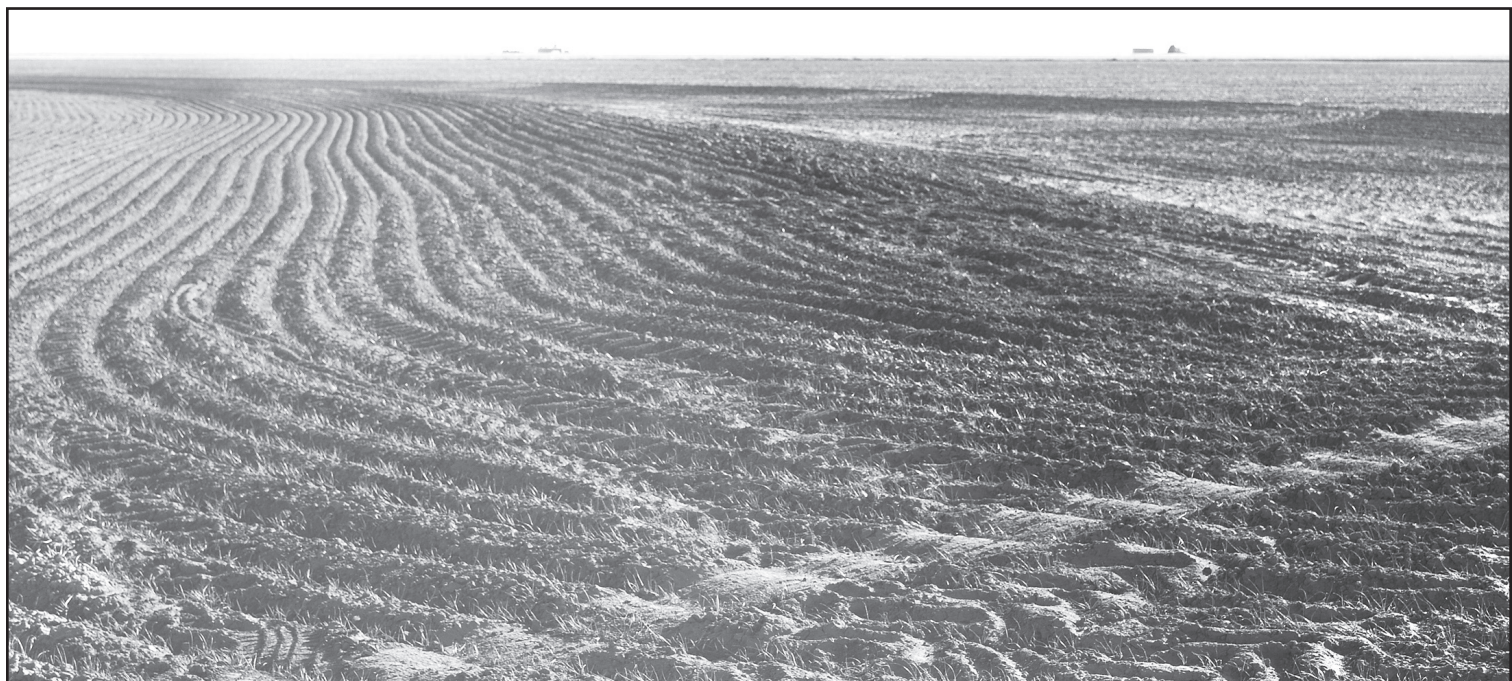
William grew up on a farm near here, graduated from college in 1973 and has been farming here ever since. His wife Diane hails from Kanorado.

The Gattshalls employ several conservation methods on their fields including brand new terraces on a wheat field designed to hold back rainwater. The field wasn't overly hilly, Gattshall said, but water was still collecting, forming a gully and flowing on his neighbor's property.

"The gullies just get worse if you don't do anything," he said.

So he contracted with a builder to create two raised berms running across the field. The terraces run several thousand feet. Gattshall said the terraces were just finished, and this year will be the first year he's had the chance to see them work, but he's confident they will stop the water flowing downhill.

Gattshall has also been using no-till farming techniques on his corn for four years. He saw his neighbor, who ran an aerial application



This terrace is one of two recently built in a field belonging to William and Diane Gattshall. The terraces are designed to stop water from collecting in a low area in the field.

Photo By Kevin Bottrell/The Goodland Star-News

service, practicing no-till farming since the 1970s.

"I said to myself, 'why am I out here destroying this cover,'" he said.

For some of Gattshall's irrigated circles, this

is the fourth year since they have been tilled. Corn stubble takes about three years to be completely broken down, he said, so in a no till field, you can generally identify three years worth of stalks.

The stubble can mean a little more risk of insects or disease, he said, but farmers can get specific insect- or disease-resistant hybrid corn. However some pesticides may still be required.

Sherman County Conservation District • Program 2012

INVOCATION Fred Wedel

Meal furnished by the **Sherman County Conservation District, BANKWEST of Kansas, First National Bank, Western State Bank, Peoples State Bank and Farm Credit Services of Western Kansas PCA-FLCA**

WELCOME Lonnie Whiteker

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(Recognize former Award Winners)

Friends of Agriculture Award	Dean Graber
State Poster and Limerick Awards.	Sandy Rodgers
Poster, Limerick, Essay Contest	Sandy Rodgers/Scott Jarrett
Windbreak Award	Peoples State Bank
Bankers Award	Peoples State Bank
Business	Lonnie Whiteker
Minutes & Treasurer's Report	Dean Graber

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NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

Fred Wedel	District Conservationist
Jason Smith	Conservation Technician

Monday, Feb. 6th
6:30 p.m. MT
VFW Hall, Goodland
Everyone Welcome!



for long-time farmers

The new corn is planted between the old rows, about 15 inches off. The trash whips on the planter provide the only tillage. Gattshall adds starter fertilizer at that point, applying nitrogen later.

For planting, Gattshall said, farmers want a firm, moist seedbed. With no-till's moisture conservation, the ground has the right conditions even in dry years. However, because the ground will be cold and wet it can slow early plant growth.

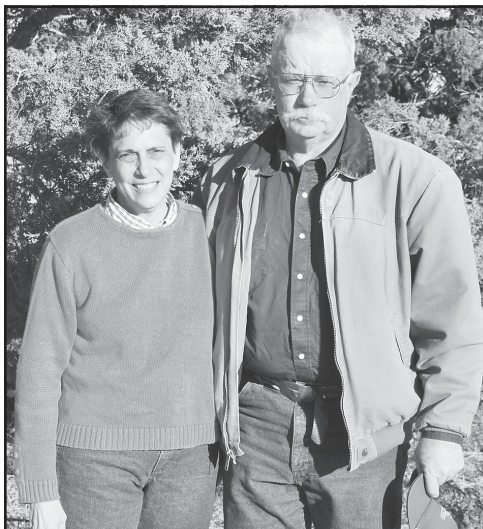
Gattshall said no till fields conserve moisture better since the top of the ground does seal up. Less water will run off in a rain storm and more of the moisture will be absorbed into the ground.

"The first thing you notice is that you don't have water running out of the field," he said.

No-till doesn't necessarily mean a farmer will use less water, however.

"I don't pump less water, but I get better use out of the water that I do pump," he said.

One of the biggest advantages is the time and labor it saves in preparing for the next year's planting. Gattshall said he might go and till part of a field if he had made bad tractor tracks in the stubble. However, he said, freezing and thawing will generally loosen the ground up and help get rid of tracks.



Diane and William Gattshall

Gattshall said he doesn't practice no-till farming on his wheat fields. He said he has tried it in the past, but has never been happy with the next year's wheat stand. It might be easier with newer rotary combines, he said, which shred the straw more and spread it around.

He does make sure to plant his wheat rows perpendicular to the northwest winds, because it helps keep erosion down in the early spring.



The Gattshalls have been using no-till farming on this field for about four years. Three year's worth of corn stubble is visible, with the fourth having completely broken down into the soil.

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District conservationist shares three topics

By Fred Wedel

District Conservationist

The annual meeting of the Sherman County Conservation District will be Monday, Feb. 6. District Manager Sandy Rodgers, the Sherman County Conservation District Board of Supervisors and I look forward to seeing you on the 6th. Students and producers are given recognition for a job well done.

As we look forward to the 2012 growing season, I have three topics on my mind. All three are important for Conservation Agriculture in Sherman County. I continue to believe the most important are “No-Till Farming Systems”.

Zero tillage cropping systems (NO-TILL).

SUNSHINE + WATER + PHOTOSYNTHESIS = \$\$\$\$\$\$

All of the agriculture products grown for sale are the result of the above formula or “Law of Nature.” The list includes wheat, corn, sunflowers, soybeans, alfalfa and grass. The grass or rangeland and feed grain is then marketed in the form of meat or milk from beef, pork, dairy, sheep or goats.

In most years in the semi-arid climate of Sherman County, water (precipitation) is the most limiting nutrient in the formula. So a system of “Conservation Agriculture” that

captures and preserves the most precipitation is vital to the economic prosperity of any rural community.

No-Till farming promotes soil quality and soil health in ways that intensive tillage systems never will. Soil quality always precedes water quality and air quality. The terms “soil quality” and “soil health” are used interchangeably. Soil Quality is defined as the ability of soil to: absorb and store water and support plant and animal life, including soil micro-organisms.

When the soil is returned to the “biological health and diversity” of the past, the water cycle, carbon cycle and nutrient cycle bring the soil eco-system back into balance. This means soil structure, soil organisms, soil organic matter, macro pores, and water infiltration rates improve greatly. Large amounts of surface residue and standing crop stubble after a crop is harvested prevent the soil from baking. Wind speed at the soil surface is reduced resulting in lower evaporation rates and more stored soil moisture resulting in better crop yields.

Tillage always dries topsoil, destroys soil structure and reduces moisture infiltration rates. Crop residue always increases organic matter, reduces wind speed at the soil surface, reduces moisture evaporation, minimizes runoff, reduces soil erosion and more importantly is food for the soil micro-organisms. The soil is

really a living breathing ecosystem that stores, transforms, and cycles nutrients through the soil. Remember, the air we breathe is 78 percent nitrogen. Legume cover crops cycle this nitrogen into the living soil and make this nitrogen available for crop & forage production... and the nitrogen is free!

Farmers and Ranchers I have met in the past 15 years are the most successful producers I know. I have asked them many times if they thought there was ever a time when tillage is beneficial. All say No! I have been using 100 percent no-till on my farm since 2002 and will continue to do so.

Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) – Key Points

CTA is a voluntary program that provides technical assistance supported by science-based technology and tools to help people conserve, maintain and improve their natural resources. Resources include soil, air, water, plants, animals and people.

Using CTA, technical assistance is given to farmers, ranchers, local government, citizen groups, Tribal governments, consultants, State and Federal agencies and others.

Technical assistance provides opportunities for maintaining and improving land and its management, conserving water and improving

water quality, providing habitat for fish and wildlife, maintaining and improving grazing land and enhancing recreational opportunities.

The CTA program does not include financial assistance. However through the CTA program, clients will develop conservation plans, which will serve as a basis for them to enter into financial assistance and easement conservation programs provided by other local, state and federal programs.

All owners and managers of private land are eligible to receive technical assistance. To receive technical assistance, a landowner or manager may contact the local Conservation District or NRCS. Participation in the CTA program is voluntary.

NRCS Conservation Programs.

Here is the list of programs available.

- Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP)
- Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)
- Conservation Plant Materials Program
- Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)
- Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)
- Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA)
- Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative

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- Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)
- Soil Survey Programs
- Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention (PL-566) Program
- Watershed Rehabilitation Program
- Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)
- Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)

I enjoy working with the people of Sherman County. District Manager Sandy Rodgers and I look forward to having a chat with you about your farming or ranching goals.

For more information about Natural Resource Management, please contact your local Conservation District at the Department of Agriculture Service Center. In Goodland the service center is located at 210 west 10th street. (785) 899-3070 extension 3. Information is also available online at www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/.

State honorable mention limerick

There once was a man name Jay,
whose topsoil had all gone away.
Now he no longer farms,
his tractor just sits in the barn,
so the bank is going to take it away.

By Kaitlen Thompson

Conservation Reserve Program still going strong after 27 years

By Matt Smith

Biologist

The 1985 Farm Bill established what was to become the nation's most successful voluntary conservation program ever: the Conservation Reserve Program!

The program was initially developed to address soil erosion at a time when soil was being lost at over 3 billion tons per year. During this period there were vast amounts of wetland drainage occurring, water quality was deteriorating, and many species of wildlife were in peril due to loss of habitat. The program we have today has evolved to equally address water quality and wildlife habitat along with soil erosion.

The program takes marginal and sensitive land out of agricultural production and offers landowners an annual rental payment to establish and maintain vegetative cover for 10-15 years.

Lands enrolled in program are often labeled as "idle, retired, or non-working lands." These terms are mistakenly applied as program lands are far from being idle or unproductive. The facts, based on several independent studies, tell a different story. For example, program areas in North Dakota, South Dakota, and Montana created habitat that led to a net increase of about two million ducks per year since 1992. Researchers found that, in prime pheasant habitat, a 4 percent increase in program cover was associated with a 22 percent increase in pheasant counts. Northern Bobwhite Quail are found significantly more in program areas with certain grass covers than sites without these practices.

Improvements to water quality from program result from

the 278 million pounds less nitrogen and 59 million pounds less phosphorus that enter waterways each year. program has reduced soil erosion by an estimated 470 million tons from pre-program levels and program sequesters more carbon than any other federally administered program, an estimated 50 million metric tons of carbon dioxide was stopped from entering the environment in 2007 due to grass cover established on program lands.

Kansans can take pride in their own program success story. When program began in 1985, policymakers in Kansas made a critical decision which had major implications for the future of wildlife in Kansas. Kansas determined the most beneficial cover for program lands in the state would be mixes of warm-season native grasses, the same predominate grasses that are found in our native grasslands. This decision was not met with unanimous support. Native grasses were expensive and at the time in short supply.

During the late 1990s, Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWP) began documenting the presence of the lesser prairie-chicken in areas they formerly occupied in southwest Kansas, but had not been seen for over 60 years. This significant expansion of their range was due to the nesting cover native grasses in program provided. The Farm Service Agency (FSA) and its partners in Kansas have been targeting program enrollment within the historic range of the LPC since 1996 by establishing Conservation Priority Areas which fostered program enrollment in critical areas.

The potential loss of program in southwest Kansas as contracts expire and are not re-enrolled has heightened the concern

for listing the species under protection of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Threatened and Endangered Species Act. Large scale efforts are currently underway to bring additional resources to this critical landscape to help landowners keep program in grass and develop prescribed grazing plans designed to benefit prairie chickens.

To gauge the impacts to the agricultural sector from eliminating the program, a study conducted by the University of Tennessee's Agricultural Policy Analysis Center predicted an additional cost to the government of \$32.6 million over the 2007-2015 study period due to an increase in farm program spending if program was eliminated. Alternatively, the study also predicted if the program statutory limit was raised to 39.2 million acres, by 2015 it would raise net farm income by \$600 million. If the limit was raised to 45 million acres, by 2015 net farm income would increase by \$1.7 billion.

As the budget debates continue in Washington, it's unclear what the 2012 Farm Bill will look like during times of declining budgets and increased agricultural and environmental challenges, with crop prices at historically high levels for the foreseeable future, and with an ever increasing world demand for food products.

As environmental problems such as changing climate and strains on our water resources continue to mount, what is clear is the investment the public has made in protecting our natural resources will be lost if we retreat from our current path of conservation commitments. Now, more than ever, we need to strengthen our support of the ecological functions that ensure the health and production capacity of our farming systems.

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ideas and tools that can make his business a little more efficient; a little more productive. He listens hard when other people talk farming. But mainly, he takes a long look at his own program and decides things for himself. Throwing out what didn't work and sticking with the things that did. Upgrading his system until his goals are reached and then upgrading some more. He's hard to please, but he's fair. A good farmer, in short, is one of America's greatest natural resources.

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2003 cedar windbreak wins this year's award

By Pat Schiefen

pjschiefen@nwkansas.com

First-time Windbreak Award winners Lawrence and Helen Musil enjoy their windbreak, saying they are able to grow a lawn and flowers with its protection. Before, Helen said, the wind would blow the soil away from the roots of the grass and flowers.

The windbreak is located north of their home north and west of Ruleton on land owned by Lynn Nelson. The windbreak is at one end of a pasture. The couple also has an older windbreak to the west of their home.

The windbreak was planted with 203 Eastern Red Cedars in April 2002. Lawrence said the trees have a lifetime of about 50 years.

The holes were dug with equipment but the trees were all planted by hand. Then weed barrier and drip irrigation were added.

Lawrence said he picked cedars because they cost about \$1 a piece and they are fast growing. The rows were planted 20 feet apart and the trees 16 feet apart. He said his son-in-law Pat Townsend, Scott Jarrett and Fred Wiedel helped plant the trees.

One thing, he said, he learned that you have to put bales around the young trees when they are small because there is nothing to stop the wind.

When asked if he would plant more trees, Lawrence said they need to replace 23 Austrian pines that died because of weather in the older windbreak.

Lawrence said he is strictly a dry land farmer. He doesn't use any irrigation and he said that dry land farming is completely different than irrigation. He grows wheat, corn or sunflowers and he does it in a cycle of wheat, corn or flowers, fallow and then back to wheat. The wheat he plants is a semi-dwarf variety called Jagalene. The only storage he has is for seed wheat. He plants oil sunflowers and when he harvests he takes them to ADM.

He said he has done strip tilling on corn and plans to do that again. Also he has grown no-till sunflowers. No till is when the ground



Helen and Lawrence Musil

is not tilled from harvest to the next spring if you plant then.

The last four or five years it has been easier to make a living and he has had quite good crops the last four years. When it was so dry in the 1990s he had no wheat crop for two or three years. It sometimes didn't even come up in the fall and he quit fertilizing when he didn't know for sure if there was even going to be a crop. Helen said that is when wives work.

Their equipment is not all that high tech and he said where they don't irrigate using a system to tell you exactly how much water each part of the field needs isn't relevant. He uses experience to let him know how much fertilizer to use.

The couple moved to their farmstead in 1969. Helen said there were no trees there at the time.

Lawrence said they bought the land and it was tough the first few years. The first three years they kind of survived. They farmed 1,000 acres. Over the years they had a small cow herd and raised hogs from farrow to finish. They bought more land and rented more. They remodeled and built their home in 1979.



An aerial photo of the home of Lawrence and Helen Musil north and west of Ruleton. The award winning wind break is across the road. The windbreak was planted in 2002.

The couple have four children. Linda Boone is married to Dan Boone and they have a Maytag store in Great Bend. Dan is from Quinter and came to Goodland to go to Northwest Kansas Vocational Technical School.

Cindy Musil is married to Kent Lehman and they live in Lakewood, Colo. She is a project manager and does consulting on computers.

Casey Musil is married to Tiffani Shank and they live in Louisburg. He is a warehouse manager for Tri-Star Seed Company.

The couple's youngest daughter is Sara Townsend who is married to Pat Townsend and they live in Sherman County. She is the materials manager for Goodland Regional Medical Center.

Lawrence was born in Goodland, they

moved later to California and then moved back. His parents are Delmer and Arleta Musil and had Musil Cabinet Shop. He graduated from in 1963 and she graduated in 1964 from Goodland High School.

Helen's maiden name was Hilt. She retired from Golden West after working there for 23 years. It has been an adjustment, she said, because she is not nearly as tired as she was and has had to change her sleeping hours. She also gets her walking in where she didn't.

Helen said she didn't expect her husband to ever retire. He said he was going to continue to farm until he was 80.

"If farming is in your blood it's difficult to do something else," said Lawrence.

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District forester named 'Friend of Agriculture'

By Kevin Bottrell

kbottrell@nwkansan.com

This year's winner of the Friend of Agriculture award is Jim Strine of the Kansas Forest Service. Strine has been the district forester for northwest Kansas for 33 years.

Strine said he was surprised when he got the call about the award.

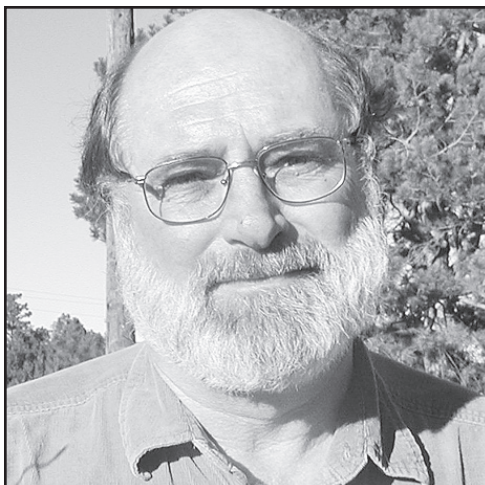
"It was out of the clear blue," he said. "I sure feel honored."

As a district forester, Strine is responsible for providing technical assistance to 24 counties in northwest Kansas. He works with cities, tree boards and landowners on tree planting and care.

Strine said he works a lot with rural landowners on windbreak management. Windbreaks can lower heating costs 20 to 30 percent in the winter, Strine said, and many farmers consider them the best place to calve. Many of the ranchers he's talked have told him that calves born behind wind breaks often develop better than those that aren't.

"They can also be a wildlife habitat," he said.

When designing a windbreak, a landowners can plant particular trees to attract specific



District Forester Jim Strine

bird species. Strine said windbreaks also add monetary value to a farm if a landowner wants to sell.

Strine makes on site visits to help them come up with ideas on species, placement, number of rows and spacing. He helps landowners work up a plan to follow.

"It's important to get the design correct at the get go," he said.

If a windbreak is too close to a farmstead,

for example, it can dump snow onto a house, rather than block it.

"And once it's in, it's hard to move," he said.

Strine said he can also come out and look at older windbreaks.

"A lot have really taken a beating over the years," he said.

Some need thinning or need trees replaced in order to be effective again.

For cities, Strine can make site visits to advise on what tree to plant and where, as well as how to take care of them when they're in the ground.

Many cities don't have a lot of professionals with tree care experience, he said.

Strine can also advise on how to take care of older trees, make insect or disease diagnosis and advise when to remove a tree, which can be a controversial decision.

"Trees have a definite lifespan," he said. "It can be difficult to convince cities to remove trees. I sometimes come up with a replacement plan. You want to get new ones established as soon as you can."

Convincing the public that a large tree needs to be removed can be the most difficult part of

the problem.

Goodland has been active in tree management, Strine said. It has been a Tree City USA for many years, and has an annual Arbor Day Celebration, something Strine has attended.

Originally from Atchison County, Strine has a bachelor's degree in forest management from the University of Missouri-Columbia and a master's in forest management from Oklahoma State.

"I thought I'd be out here for two to three years, then I'd move back to eastern Kansas," he said. "That was 33 years ago."

People say there are no forests in western Kansas, but Strine said that discounts the importance of trees in cities and along waterways.

"It's a different type of forestry," he said.

Even though he has 24 counties to look after, Strine said he has gotten to Sherman County plenty over the years. The Sherman County Natural Resource and Conservation Service office has sent a lot of people his way with questions, he said. If people need his expertise, a good first stop is the conservation office, he said.

Apply now for rural forestry enhancement money

By Robert Atchison

Rural Forestry Program Coordinator

Kansas landowners should act now to apply for financial assistance funds through the 2012 Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative. An early spring application evaluation period cutoff date is expected. The funds can help restore or enhance the state's declining windbreaks, woodlands and/or riparian (streamside) forests.

This means some of the \$200,000-plus requested for Kansas' 2012 projects is still available for qualified landowners, said Bob Atchison, rural forestry coordinator for the Kansas Forest Service.

"As an Environmental Quality Incentives Program initiative through the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the the initiative can address all kinds of natural resource needs associated with

agricultural lands. Landowner participation is both voluntary and competitive. The projects also can be ambitious enough to take more than one funding year," Atchison said.

the initiative forestry funds can provide payment assistance for establishing riparian plantings and for improving or renovating windbreaks, forests, and woodlands, he said. The costs can include using heavy equipment to remove unhealthy trees, planting quality trees and shrubs, controlling weeds, and installing protective fencing or a micro-drip irrigation system.

"For Kansas, the initiative couldn't come at a better time," Atchison said. "The state's needs are becoming critical in terms of our having healthy, mature trees in place—not only to preserve our soil resources but also to protect our water resources. Increasing pressures on our natural resources have been leaving us in an increasingly vulnerable place."

Landowners may also contact the the forest service at Kansas State University by phone at (785) 532-3310 or by email at Atchison@ksu.edu. More information about the forestry initiative is available at <http://www.kansasforests.org/rural/lib/eqip.pdf>. the program self-assessment worksheets that landowners can use to prepare for applying (and earn extra points for their application) are at <http://www.ks.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/eqip/>.

Landowners can apply for these funds at the Natural Resource Conservation Service office in their local the agency Service Center. Offices can accept applications year round. Applications that miss a particular year's cutoff date will be evaluated in the following fiscal year.

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Sherman County Conservation District Annual Report for the Year 2011

This is the Annual Report of the Sherman County Conservation District for the Calendar year of 2011.

The 2011 Annual Meeting was held February 14, 2011 at the VFW in Goodland. Mr. and Mrs. Dwight Chipperfield received the Banker's Award and Mr. and Mrs. Terry Baker were recipients of the Windbreak Award. Ken Klemm and family were recipients of the Friends of Agriculture Award.

One hundred twenty cooperators enjoyed the meal furnished by the District and local banks. Bill Selby introduced the Expressos who provided the entertainment for the evening. Dennis Shank and Selby were elected to the board by secret ballot.

Twenty three plaques were presented at the 2011 Annual Meeting for the Poster, Limerick, and Essay contest. Sandy Rodgers, district manager, presented conservation programs prior to the contest.

The *Goodland Star News* published the Annual Soil Conservation Edition and continues to support the efforts of Conservation in Sherman County.

Sherman County Farmers continue to support conservation in Sherman County. All Compliance plans are on schedule. Approximately 391 CRP contracts are in place for approximately 41,550.50 acres. The State Water Resources Cost Share funded jobs for 2011 included tanks, livestock wells, pipelines and septic systems that were failing. There are twenty-five active EQIP contracts, one Wetland Reserve Program contract, eleven Conservation Security Program contracts and three Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program contracts in Sherman County.

The Sherman County Conservation District continues a strong education and information

program. A fair booth was displayed in August. Rodgers worked with 5th graders on the Poster, Limerick, Essay Contest. The 3rd through 4th Grades also participated in the Poster and Limerick Contest. She gave programs in the classroom. In April the local 4th graders along with 4th graders from area counties met in Colby and attended the 5th annual "Conservation Kids Roundup" sponsored by the Northwest Kansas Conservation and Environmental Alliance. The Sherman County Conservation District Board supported the State Resource Conservation and Development conference held in Colby and hosted by Western Prairie RC&D. The District Board awarded Hazen Deeds a graduating senior in Sherman County a scholarship to attend Kansas State University.

The District offers grass seed, flags, trees, rabbit netting and weed barrier for sale as a service to area cooperators, as well as, providing additional funding for the District Programs.

Sherman County Conservation District paid dues to the National Association of Conservation Districts, the Kansas Association of Conservation Districts, the KACD Auxiliary, Western Prairie RC&D, and the Kansas Association of Conservation District's Employees Organization.

The District works closely with their conservation partners, including State and National legislators, NRCS, County Commissioners, K-State Extension, Wildlife and Parks, FSA, Groundwater Management District #4, High Plains Roosters chapter of Pheasants Forever, and many others to reach mutual conservation goals. Rodgers serves as the Conservation District's representative to the Western Prairie RC&D with Fred Hall serving as alternate. Sandy Rodgers is currently the President of the Western Prairie RC&D. Greg Nemechek

represents the Sherman County Commissioners and serves as Vice President. Nemechek and Rodgers attended the State RC&D meeting held at Wichita in November. The meeting was held in conjunction with the KACD Convention. Sandy Rodgers was elected Secretary of the State RC&D Association. Nemechek, Rodgers, Mary Volk, Janet Rumble and Fred Hall serve on the local advisory committee for Western Prairie RC&D and Fred Wedel serves as an advisor to that group.

The Sherman County Conservation District Manager, Sandy Rodgers, continues to participate in the Northwest Kansas Conservation and Environmental Alliance. This group consists of District Managers representing eight County Conservation Districts. Their objective is to search for funding through grants and foundations to enhance and ensure a quality environment for future generations in Northwest Kansas. The group is planning their 6th Annual Conservation Roundup for 4th graders in April and a Women's Ag Confer-

ence in October 2012. Sandy was re-elected President of the group.

Mr. and Mrs. Lynn Ihrig, Mr. and Mrs. Dean Graber, Mr. and Mrs. Scott Jarrett, and Rodgers attended the KACD Convention held at Wichita in November. Kaitlen Thompson was awarded Honorable Mention for Limerick at the State Convention in Wichita.

The District reviewed their long-range program and also reviewed the memorandums of understanding with all cooperating agencies.

The Sherman County Conservation District's objective is to promote locally led conservation and to assist landowners and operators apply conservation practices to the land with the technical assistance from the Natural Resources Conservation Service. The Conservation Office is available for assistance to anyone needing help solving his or her conservation needs. The District Board meets the first Thursday after the first Tuesday of every month with the exception of July.

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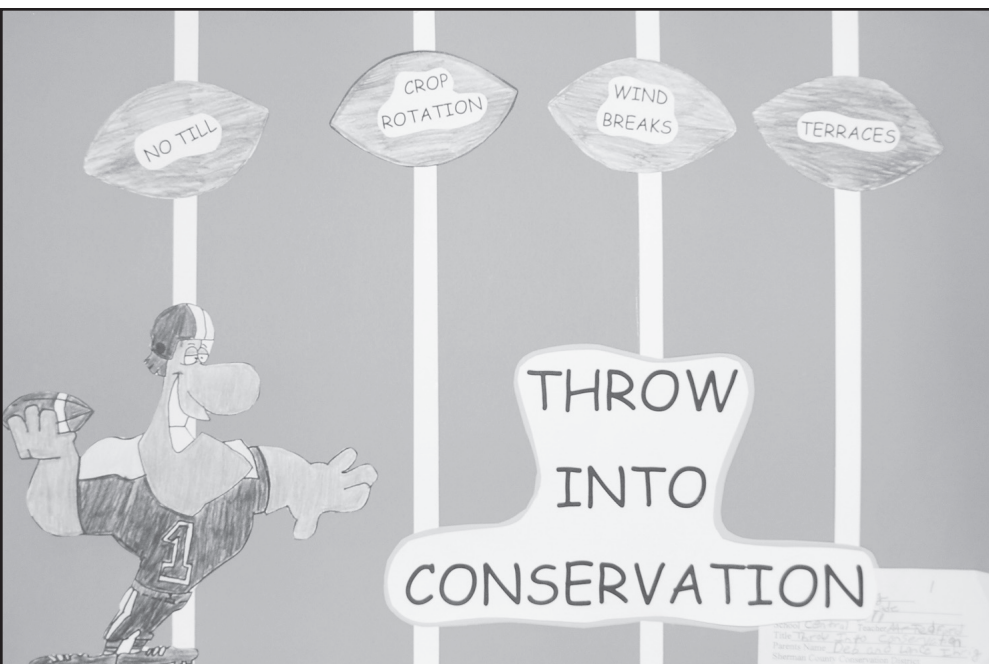


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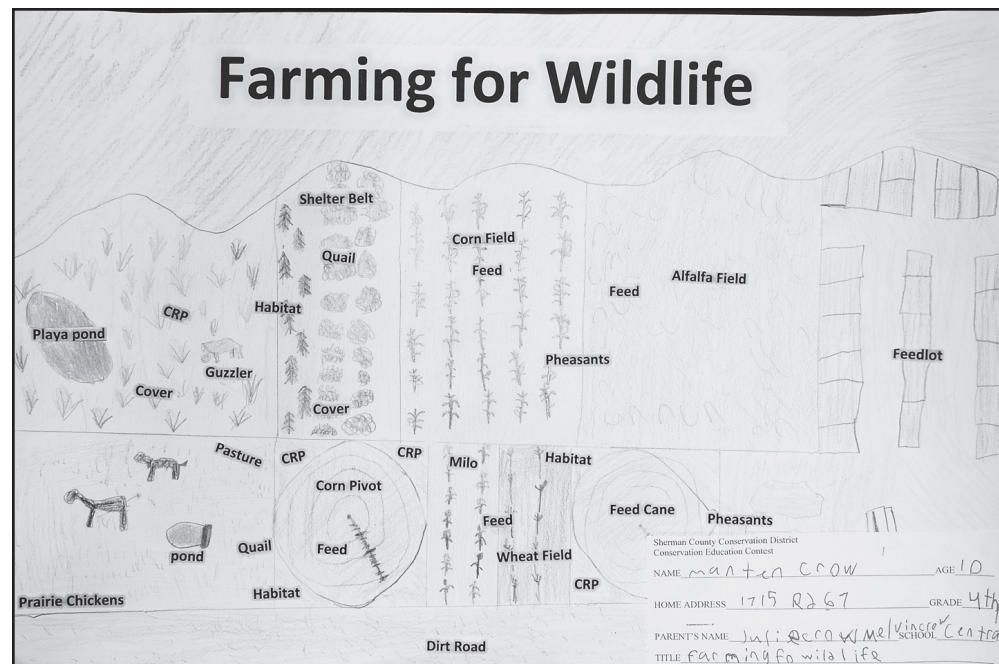
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Garin Ihrig, winner 5th through 8th grades



Manten Crow, winner 3rd and 4th grades

Conservation District names poster, limerick and essay contest winners

Posters

3rd and 4th Grade

- 1st Manten Crow
- 2nd Jacob Amack
- 3rd Hannah Dechant
- HM Aracely Bustillos
- HM Brooke Drennan

Posters

5th through 8th Grade

- 1st Garin Ihrig
- 2nd Josue Renteria
- 3rd Champ King
- HM Emanuel Briones
- HM Grace Greene

Limericks

5th through 8th Grade

- 1st Ray Lalicker
- 2nd Ella Ihrig
- 3rd Bryson West
- HM Chris Berls
- HM Robbie Lawson
- HM Talon Corke

Essays

- 1st Kaitlen Thompson
- 2nd Katelynn Frazier

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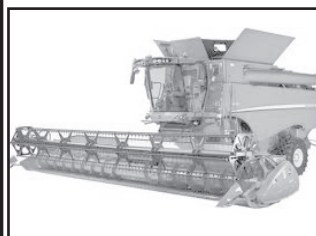
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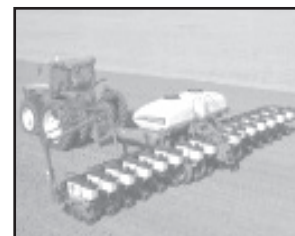


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Annual maintenance vital for waste facilities

By John Vavroch

Civil Engineering Technician

Just as we perform routine maintenance on our trucks, cars, other vehicles, and tractors, maintenance must also be performed on livestock waste facilities to keep structural components working properly.

Components of a waste storage facility generally include a waste storage pond, liquid/solid separation facility (settling basin), manure transfer pipe, timber picket dam, fresh water diversion(s), critical area seeding, and safety fence.

During construction of the waste pond, a compacted clay liner is constructed in the bottom and sides of the pond. This liner reduces seepage of the pond to acceptable levels, usually .10 to .25 inch per day or approximately 5000 gallons per acre per day. One-half foot of protective soil cover is placed on top of the liner. This cover should be inspected periodically and material added, if necessary, to ensure the integrity of the liner.

Other than the pond liner, the liquid/solid separation facility or settling basin is probably the most important component of the system. It

does just what the name implies. As heavy rains wash manure and sediment from the pens, the solids run down into the settling basin where they settle out of the liquid. The timber picket dam helps hold back the solids so just the liquid enters the outlet pipe to the waste pond. This increases the longevity of the pond. It is much easier to clean the manure from the settling basin than the waste pond. The settling basin should be cleaned every year or two or after any significant rainfall event. The pipe inlet should be inspected after each rainfall event, and the timber picket dam should be cleared of any debris.

Disturbed areas are seeded back to grass after construction. Normally, a cool-season grass mix is used as it establishes quicker than native species. It is important to get grass established as soon as possible to provide erosion control for the new structures. Reseeding may be necessary in places that did not establish or have been damaged.

A safety fence is installed around the pond and sometimes the settling basin. These fences need to be maintained to keep animals and humans out of these areas.

Arbor Day



Area students were taught some of the principals of conservation at last year's Arbor Day celebration at Van Gogh Park. The celebration included the planting of several new trees.
Photo by Tom Betz/The Goodland Star-News

Recent drought affecting upland bird populations

By Daryl Fisher

Biologist

The extended and expansive drought experienced in parts of Kansas has had a significant effect on pheasant and quail populations this year. There are probably very few young birds from this year's reproductive effort in some parts of the state.

Poor or nonexistent wheat crops in the early spring would not have provided much in the way of suitable nesting habitat. Chicks that did hatch would have starved to death in areas where it was so dry that broadleaf plants and weeds did not sprout or died due to drought. If there were few live weeds, then there would not have been enough small insects that live best on broadleaf plants that chicks must have to survive and grow.

Vegetation in southwest Kansas really did not green-up until late summer, long after it was needed by chicks that normally hatch in late spring and early summer.

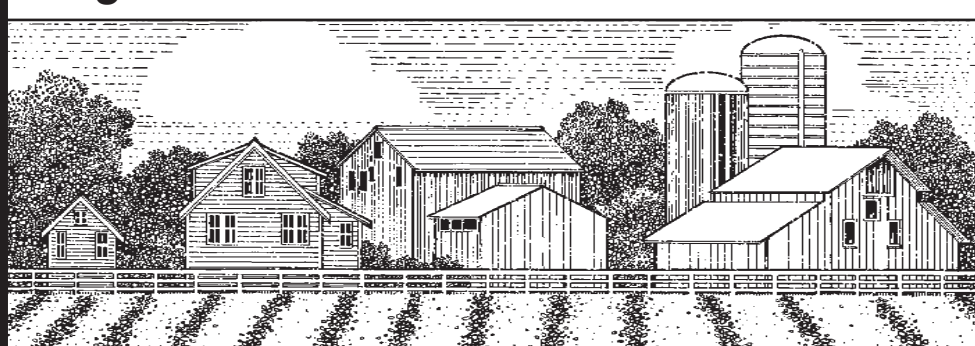
So, what is a landowner to do to help get more birds on the farm again? Should he or she prevent anyone from hunting during the upcoming season? Preventing hunters from pursuing pheasants and quail will not really do much to speed the recovery of pheasant and quail populations following something like a drought.

Most hunters will not continue hunting very long if they don't have much luck finding birds. Numbers of hunters in the field will decline rapidly after opening weekend without the amount of success they think is needed to keep up their interest.

The best way to help upland birds build up in population (short of making it rain again) is to manage some of your land to provide the habitat necessities birds need, so that when nature does decide to cut loose with a more "normal" amount of precipitation, the habitat will be there.

Nesting cover can be provided by good springtime wheat crops or native grass-type plantings, such as Conservation Reserve Program with a significant amount of last year's growth still present in the spring. Brood cover is best provided with some "weedy" areas with broadleaf plants that allow maneuvering room and insects the chicks can catch themselves. Winter cover is provided by areas with sturdy vegetation that will stay standing in the winter.

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Living through drought takes careful planning

By David J. Kraft

State Rangeland Management Specialist

"Extreme or Exceptional Drought" are words many of us are all too familiar with this year in Kansas. Unfortunately, many predictions do not reveal much change in the immediate future. With that said, how do your pastures or grazing lands look going into the dormant season? What are your expectations for those same plant communities next spring? Is it too early to plan for drought next year or for years to come? Tough questions often lead to tough answers or decisions. However, a little pre-planning can make some of those decisions or choices easier to make when or if the drought continues.

Drought is generally defined as a prolonged period of time during which precipitation is less than 75 percent of average for a given year, or poor distribution of precipitation in a single year, or less than average precipitation in successive years. This certainly defines a majority of land in the southern half of the state this year. It is also a more common occurrence as we go from the east to the west in the state. While drought is more common and maybe even more planned for in the west, it is still common for the ranching community to fail to plan for or be pro-active in management responses to the onset of drought conditions.

Reality would indicate that rangeland vegetation in Kansas in any given year is either in the recovery phase, under the direct influence of drought, or approaching the next moisture deficient period of time. Through time, and especially in the past 100 years of domestic grazing in the Great Plains, dramatic shifts in species composition (types of native plants which exist in rangeland) have been documented, especially during and following the major drought of the 1930s. In fact, the only climatic difference this year offers from the past is that we have only experienced a short period of moisture deficit to this point.

Before we discuss what actions are on the ta-

ble for rangeland managers to choose from and address drought conditions, let's look at what the impacts and outcomes are of drought.

Drought Impacts

One finding documented by the Nebraska Cooperative Extension in their document EC 91-123, is that the combination of drought and heavy grazing can cause severe reductions in forage production and plant vigor. When this happens we also see changes in species composition causing the surface or plant cover to also change. In fact, drought conditions can be worsened by poor grazing management during a defined drought. This also causes any moisture which does fall during the drought to be less effective. When grazing results in plant community changes and decreased plant vigor, less moisture actually enters the soil to become useful to the plant.

Getting more effective precipitation into the soil is a result of more healthy root systems which become more extensive, providing more surface openings for water movement into the soil profile. No one wishes to make any drought more impactful from a negative point of view, but this commonly happens when managers fail to take steps to benefit the plant community. In those moments or instances, when tough decisions become tougher, most producers think of the livestock first and the grazing resource second. Recovery time is increased in rangeland where range condition or vigor (health of the plant community) is lower going into drought conditions or not properly managed within a drought.

What can we do now that we are in a drought?

Take a close look at current stocking rates. With a 50 percent decrease in rainfall or precipitation, stocking rates may need to be reduced by 40 percent. At a 30 percent reduction in rainfall, stocking rates may need to be reduced by 20 percent. However, one must ask first, am I currently stocking my grazing lands at a rate which provides long term sustain-

ability. If I am currently over using the forage being produced annually, my reductions could even require deeper cuts or extended periods of rest from grazing.

Early weaning

Another option that is available to cow/calf producers is early weaning of calves. Take into consideration that cattle will typically average the consumption of 3 percent of their body weight each day. If you have 500-pound calves still grazing alongside their mothers, you can quickly reduce the pressure on the grazing resource by approximately a third by weaning the calves.

Many cow/calf producers are becoming more interested in moving their calving season later into the spring months, helping cut expenses by not having to feed a cow as much hay through the high-demand last trimester leading up to birthing the calf and then after the calf is born. Simply not having to put up as much hay not only cuts expenses, it also may provide for more acres to spread out the grazing pressure from year to year. In addition to this, producers may also choose to limit the exposure time to hay for cattle they are feeding. The cost and resource savings within this practice is based upon the amount of waste being generated by cows loafing around the hay supply and consuming more forage than needed.

Improvement of rangeland condition and vigor should be practiced or targeted in years not identified as drought years, leading to quicker recovery of plant communities coming out of drought periods. This can be accomplished by implementing a drought plan.

Drought Plan

A drought plan should minimize financial hardships and hasten vegetation recovery after drought. It should also identify actions to be taken at the first sign of drought as well as with continued indications of moisture and forage shortages. Any stocking rate adjustments should be specific in terms of how many and how long!

These actions should be based upon seasonal check points and indicators. Some of these include or involve monthly monitoring to compare forage supplies to the resource potential, moisture to begin the season, quickness of green-up of desirable species, and any carryover or accumulated forage.

Trigger points or evaluation times will vary depending upon where you reside in the state from east to west. In the eastern part of the state, drought recovery or at least exiting from the effects of a drought are more likely to happen but still require producers to evaluate their resources in the early spring. In the central part of the state, this evaluation should occur and will depend upon moisture availability and accumulation of moisture during the period of the previous September-through-November time frame. In the western third of the state this is advanced to the two previous years. Remember, when you are in a severe drought or moisture deficit, only above average moisture will speedily change that designation. Normal or below-normal moisture will not allow for a departure from most drought impacts.

These dates or evaluation periods are only the beginning. Dates within the current growing season are also pivotal points by which producers can have decisions already made so they can step into action and implement their strategy. Typically, producers should have a set list of possible actions based upon their findings from April 1 and every 45 days thereafter. Deciding on these actions ahead of time will better prepare you when and if the time requires you to act. The idea here is to be a manager of action not reaction.

Individuals who have actively deployed drought plans in the past would tell you that they were able to improve their rangeland during a drought and immediately coming out of a drought, not merely allowing it to survive, but to thrive.

Congratulations to the Sherman County Conservation District Award Winners!

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