



Butler County Conservation District 76th Annual Edition

KANSAS BANKERS ASSOCIATION AWARD SOIL CONSERVATION

2021 Key Banker Award for Soil Conservation

L & M Ag Inc.
Fred Langenegger and Joel McClenahan

Our Thanks to Butler County Banks for Sponsoring the Key Banker Award!

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**2021
Grassland
Award**
Vestring Ranch
**Steve and
Tex Vestring**



Sign provided by Sharp Bros. Seed Company 800-462-8483

January 2022

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One of the premier extension sites for information on the agricultural economy, from Kansas State University.

Questions?
Rich Llewelyn:
rvi@ksu.edu

Kansas Bankers Association 2021 Soil Conservation Award L & M Ag

L and M Ag Inc. (Fred Langenegger and Joel McClenahan) are the recipients of the 2021 Key Banker Award for Soil Conservation.

L and M Ag Inc. is located southeast of Elbing. The farm operation consists of cropland, hayland and a feedlot for stocker cattle.



Fred Langenegger's Father, Fred Sr., started farming in this area in the 1930's and 1940's.

As with many family farm operations, as the years passed, the farming was handed down to Fred. Fred still helps out with the farming operation today when an extra hand is

needed.

Joel is not related to Fred; however, Joel's parents and Fred and his late wife Ruth were good friends. When Joel was in junior high school, he began working for Fred in the summers. He continued working for Fred every summer till he finished college in 2004. He then worked for Fred full time after college. Joel now runs the day-to-day operation of the farm along with Cory Erwin who helps part time. Joel's wife Jessica keeps the books for the farm.



Corn, beans and wheat are the main crops grown on the farm. Fields are no-tilled and strip tilled. They also have alfalfa which they bale for hay to feed the cattle. In 2017-2018, Fred participated in the USDA Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to assist with installation of concrete grade stabilization



structures, terraces and a diversion in one of their fields.

Fred has also used the Water Resources Cost Share Program to install a tile outlet terrace. In 2018, cover crops were incorporated into the crop rotation after corn. Joel was interested in using cover crops to reduce soil compaction and for grazing.

Joel doesn't have much time for hunting now, but when he was younger, he hunted a lot with friends. He remembers seeing lots of quail and pheasant back then. He does not see as many now as in years past.

Kansas Bankers Award—(continued from page 2)

Although expensive, technology has increased productivity on the farm. Joel has seen good results



with the use of GPS and harvest data. The farm ground is in much better shape now than in the days of conventional tillage. Of course, weather is always a challenge but Joel also mentioned market volatility, herbicide resistance and government regulations as being hurdles with farming and being able to make a profit.

“Don’t be afraid to try new things.” Joel commented. “You may not be successful every time, but you’ll learn a lot.”

Joel and his wife Jessica have 4 children, three sons; Levi (11), Griffin (9), Jake (7) and daughter Annie is 3. The farm keeps Joel busy but the family is involved with their kids’ activities and activities at Grace Community Church in Newton.

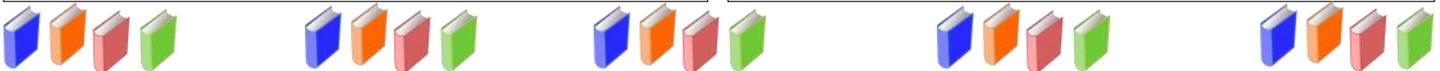
The 2021 Soil Conservation Award is sponsored by the Kansas Bankers Association.

Congratulations, L & M Ag!



Jessica, Annie, Levi, Joel, Jake and Griffin McClenahan

Photo Courtesy of the McClenahan Family



Farm Service Agency—Conservation Reserve Program Continuous Enrollment Period

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is accepting offers for specific conservation practices under the Conservation Reserve Program Continuous Signup. The USDA Farm Service Agency’s (FSA) CRP is a voluntary program that contracts with agricultural producers so that environmentally sensitive agricultural land is devoted to conservation benefits. CRP participants establish long-term, resource-conserving vegetative species, such as approved grasses or trees (known as “covers”), to control soil erosion, improve the water quality and enhance wildlife habitat. In return, FSA provides participants with annual rental payments and cost-share assistance. Continuous signup enrollment contracts are 10 to 15 years in duration.

Under continuous CRP signup, environmentally sensitive land devoted to certain conservation practices can be enrolled in CRP at any time. Offers are automatically accepted provided the land and producer meet certain eligibility requirements and the enrollment levels do not exceed the statutory cap. Unlike CRP enrollments under general CRP signups or CRP Grasslands, offers for continuous enrollment are not subject to competitive bidding during specific periods.

Eligible practices include grass waterways, filter strips, riparian buffers, windbreaks and pollinator habitat. Under CRP continuous signup, FSA provides eligible participants with annual rental payments and cost-share assistance.

For more information about FSA and its programs, visit www.fsa.usda.gov or contact your local FSA office.

2021 Grassland Award Vestring Ranch



One word, "family", comes to mind as you look around the office at the Vestring Ranch. Steve and Louis (Tex) Vestring run the operation now, but pictures of their grandfather and their dad and his brothers are displayed on the walls and the desks around the office. Each

family member played a role in the establishment and success of the ranch in their time; Steve and Tex now carry on the ranching tradition with long days, hard work and a love for the land, the cattle and the horses that are in their care.

Vestring Ranch is located southeast of Cassoday in the heart of the Flint Hills. Steve and Tex's great-grandfather homesteaded in the area around Burns in 1879. In the early 1920's the Vestrings purchased land around Cassoday. At that time, Cassoday became a major railroad shipping point for cattle in the area. There were pens for cattle on the north and south ends of Cassoday for loading the cattle onto the train cars. The Ranch was a prime area because it was so close to the railroad.

Trucks became the only way to move cattle to and from the Flint Hills after the railroad stopped shipping cattle in 1962.

Years ago, the Vestrings would receive 3-4 year-old steers from South Texas by rail. These steers, with their big, thin frames, would gain weight so fast on the high protein Flint Hills grass. Throughout the grazing season, their granddad, who had a good cutting horse, would cut out the fatter steers and take them to the railroad for shipping back east. The meat from those steers was some of the most tender available.

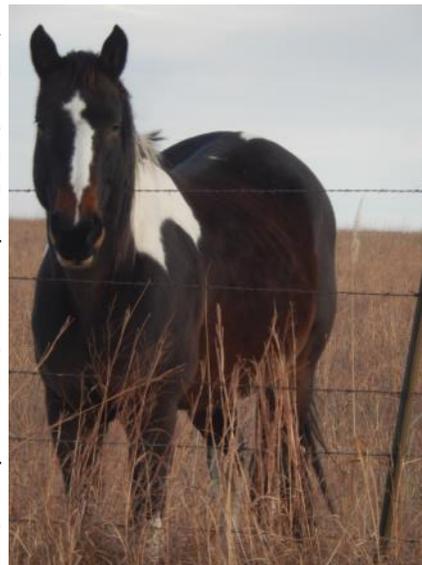
Stocker cattle are still purchased from South Texas in April and brought to Vestring Ranch. The Vestrings run about 2,000 head of cattle and they participate in a program sponsored by the Bureau of Land Management to run wild mustangs on their property.



Cattle and horses are grazed in separate pastures on the ranch. In the past, the Bureau of Land Management required large tracts of land for the wild horses. Now the minimum number of horses is 200 head which allows more private landowners to participate in the program.

The BLM wild horse program in Kansas is managed out of their Reno, Nevada Office; they have a person from Norman, Oklahoma that comes up to the ranch at least twice a year to help them count horses and check on their condition.

Steve mentioned they do have some cropland. Melvin and Allen Busenitz and Josh Wiebe manage the farmland for them so they can devote all their time to the ranching operation. The ranch



is run primarily by Steve and Tex. Tim Rogers is their foreman. Tim has helped the Vestring's with their ranch operation the past 14 years.

Burning is a vital component in keeping the native grass productive and for reducing weeds and trees. They burn every 2-3 years as necessary based on assessment of soil condition and forage growth. They use a combination of horses and 4-wheelers when working cattle and horses. Typically, they use 4-wheelers with the horses and check cattle on horseback. It's easier to observe any health issues with cattle on horseback.

Continued on page 5

Grassland Award—(continued from page 4)

The Vestrings have taken advantage of several Federal and State cost share programs over the years. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) has been used for seeding cropland back to grass and for installing watering facilities during the 2006 drought. They have also used the State cost share program for watering facilities, planting some cropland back to native grass and for installing watering facilities. The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) was also used for seeding cropland back to grass. Vestring Ranch was selected to participate in the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) in 2005 which compensated them based on the good management practices they were using on the ranch.

Steve and Tex have always been generous with allowing the NRCS to implement conservation practices on their



A field day showing how rock was used in one of the Vestring pastures to repair a gully; Steve Vestring is in the foreground looking at the rock.

pastures, monitor their effectiveness and then allow educational field days to showcase the conservation work completed.

A new program through EQIP that Steve and Tex have applied for is called the Great Plains Grassland Initiative and seeks to reclaim and protect the Flint Hills from tree invasion. They also participate in the Partners for Wildlife Program through the US Fish and Wildlife Service. That program provides funding to help landowners restore and enhance wildlife habitat on their land.

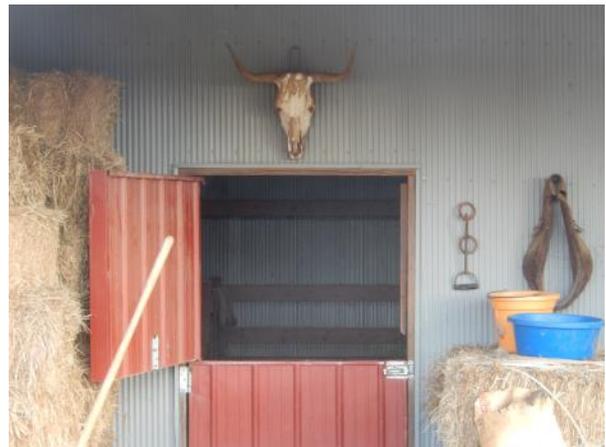
They have noticed a decline in the Prairie Chicken population for years; they only see about a quarter of what they used to on their ranch. They have seen an improvement with the quail population in recent years. They receive some deer and bird hunting revenue from out of state hunters who are allowed to hunt their land.

One change the Vestrings have seen over the years is having a shorter grazing season. They now take cattle off pastures in July and August rather than leaving them on till October. This allows the grass to recover and store reserves before winter. The endless battle to control Sericea Lespedeza is another adjustment; Sericea wasn't an issue years ago. Fortunately, the company they hire to help control Sericea have GPS outfitted on their 4-wheelers and they are very effective in controlling the weed. Years ago, square bales were the only option for hay. This required more time for putting up hay and it also required the hay to be stored in sheds to keep the quality. Now they use round bales which are less time consuming, can be stored outside and can be located nearer to the pastures where the hay is needed. They also noted the cattle markets seem to be tied to global issues now more than on a regional level. Consolidation of packing plants into only a handful of owners is also a major concern.

When asked to sum up their ranching operation, Tex mentioned one word, "efficiency." Steve and Tex love what they do, they look for ways to improve and they use cost share programs and incentives to their advantage; like a well-oiled machine they know what they are doing and it shows.

Steve and Tex both agreed that their work is their hobby. It's their way of life and what they enjoy doing. They also agreed that there are good times and not so good times with ranching; their advice is to never give up hope because change is always around the corner.

It's not uncommon to see two little heads bobbing along with their father Steve and uncle Tex as they go about their work. Mary Grace and Stephen Traver are now the 5th generation in a family of ranchers on the Vestring Ranch.



Congratulations, Vestring Ranch!

The 2021 Grassland Award is sponsored by the Kansas Association of Conservation Districts Grasslands Committee and Sharp Brothers Seed Company.

Range Youth Camp Scholarships Available!

Attention upcoming high school sophomores, juniors and seniors with an interest in rangeland management— Each year the Conservation District offers scholarships to attend the week long Range Youth Camp sponsored by the Kansas Section Society for Range Management.

The camp is June 14—17, 2022 at Camp Mennoscah near Murdock, Kansas in Kingman County.

During this week long camp, students will learn to identify rangeland plants, determine plant growth and stocking rates, discuss livestock nutrition, rangeland wildlife management and much more!

There will be a special field trip and a steak and potato dinner provided during the week long camp.

Fun activities are also scheduled and include swimming, canoeing, fishing and hiking.

Tuition is \$250. The Conservation District offers full scholarships to students who attend from Butler County.

Contact the District Office for more information, 316-320-3549.



Highly Erodible Land (HEL) and Wetland Determinations

Jeff Parks, DOC Technician
El Dorado Field Office

Landowners and/or Operators, if you are participating in government programs and are unsure if your land has an HEL determination or Wetland determination, you should contact the Farm Service Agency (FSA) or Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

If you have plans to create a new drainage system, do land leveling, filling, dredging or land clearing of trees, an AD-1026 form will need to be completed with the FSA office.

If there are questions regarding tree removal or hydric soil, check with NRCS while you are visiting with FSA.

The best plan is to have the HEL and Wetland determination completed before starting your projects.

A copy of Form AD-1026 can be found online at:
www.fsa.usda.gov/ad1026form

AD-1026
(10-30-14)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FarmServiceAgency

HIGHLY ERODIBLE LAND CONSERVATION (HEL) AND
WETLAND CONSERVATION (WC) CERTIFICATION



Sign Up Now for Financial Assistance in Implementing Conservation Practices on Your Farm or Ranch Cost Share Sign-Up—January 1 to April 30

Controlling soil erosion on your farm or ranch can be expensive. That's why financial assistance is made available to local landowners through the State Water Plan Fund. The Conservation District administers these funds for Butler County. Funds are provided to landowners who qualify based upon state criteria and local program requirements set forth by the Conservation District.

Landowners who are interested in receiving financial assistance need to fill out an application before April 30, 2022 to be considered for our next round of funding that we receive in July 2022. Applications received by April 30th are prioritized and ranked based on a number of factors. These include the type of practice to be implemented, whether the practice is located in a high priority watershed and location of practice to sensitive areas such as perennial or intermittent streams, wells or public water supplies. Applications that rank high are funded first.

Conservation practices eligible for cost share include: grassed waterways, terraces, underground outlets, diversions, pasture and hayland planting, range seeding, sediment control basins, wetland creation, filter strips, ponds, watering facilities, fencing, plugging abandoned water wells, upgrading livestock waste systems and repairing failing septic systems. A complete list of guidelines and eligible practices can be obtained at the conservation office.

All cost share practices must meet NRCS Standards and Specifications in order for cost share to be paid.

If you have some erosion issues, call us or stop by and talk to us. We can pull up a map on the computer to discuss areas in your field(s) that concern you and then come out to the field and with your help, determine the best way to solve an erosion problem. It costs you nothing to ask or have us come out and look. We can provide some estimates on cost so you can make a determination on whether you want to proceed with the project.



For more information on the cost share program, eligibility, or a complete list of practices that can be funded with cost share, contact Sandy Koontz at the Conservation District office, 316-320-3549.

Butler County Conservation District Supervisors



Back Row—Richard Scott, Justin Grunder,
Russell Janzen
Front Row— Linda Klaassen, Walter Burress



Thanks to all past and present conservation district supervisors for your time and talents and your service and commitment to protecting our soil and water resources.

"If conservation of natural resources goes wrong, nothing else will go right."

— M. S. Swaminathan

The first conservation district in Kansas was formed in Labette County in 1938

In 1954, Shawnee County was the last of the 105 conservation districts in Kansas to be formed.

Butler County Conservation District's Charter was January 29, 1945.

Weeds that Speak

By Brandi McCoy, Private Land Conservationist
Pheasants Forever, Inc. and Quail Forever

Names are powerful. For instance, you might walk by a plant your whole life and never notice it until you learn its name. I'm often sent photos of "weeds" and that's the first question I'm asked, "What's its name?", "Is it bad?" And then, "How do I kill it?" I would argue that we aren't asking the right questions.

The first thing we need to ask is "What is a weed?" I've heard the definition, "A plant that is out of place". Not very helpful if you ask me, since anything from an oak tree to corn would qualify. I prefer Nicole Masters' definition, "*weeds are valuable indicators and storytellers.*" They're generally annual plants that thrive in disturbed soil and they show up for a reason.

Weeds show up because nature has detected a problem in the soil and she's going to fix it. In Nicole Master's book, *For the Love of Soil*, she discusses the reasons why nature uses weeds. Some weeds sprawl to cover bare soil, others have roots ideal for breaking through compaction layers, others are valuable for breaking down toxins, or they could indicate we have low organic matter, a nutrient imbalance, or an imbalance in the microbial ecosystem in the soil. For example, cheatgrass can indicate that our soil has an imbalance of microbes and not enough plant-available calcium.

Our first instinct might be to spray all the weeds or till, but this doesn't get to the root of the problem and could potentially make things worse. Before we grab those herbicides, we need to figure out what caused the issue in the first place (is it our management?). Or, do we really have a problem? In some cases, we need weeds.

Particularly if you're interested in wildlife habitat, native weeds (forbs) are invaluable. Forbs attract insects which makes up about 90% of a quail chick's diet. Later in the year, those forbs will produce seeds that will help get those birds through the winter. Other wildlife depend on forbs for food sources too, such as deer, which depending on the time of year, can make up 40-60% of their diet.

Even our livestock producers need "weeds". Yes, cattle eat more than grass! If forbs are available to them, they will comprise 20-30% of their diet. Some of those forbs are very high in protein when other native plants aren't. Forbs serve many roles providing the animals with certain nutrients and can even serve medicinal purposes. Some forbs act as de-wormers, offset bloat, and act as antibiotics. As Fred Provenza mentions in his book **Nourishment**, livestock learn which plants and combinations of plants serve these purposes, but this can only happen if the diverse plants are present for the livestock to do so.

The key here is diversity. So, look at those weeds in your pasture, are they diverse and interspersed? Or are they a monoculture? If the weeds *appear* to take over our pasture, we know it's time to start asking the right questions and get to the bottom of the problem. So how do you kill a weed? Learn its name, then listen to the story it's trying to tell you.

For more information about private lands conservation assistance in Butler County, contact Brandi at (785) 285-2356 or BMcCoy@PheasantsForever.Org or Brandi.McCoy@usda.gov.

Remember When?

Remember when you got a new toy, game or bicycle and your Mom would say, "now if you take care of that it will last a long time."

Remember your first car? Your Dad probably said, "Check the oil, antifreeze and tires regularly; take care of the little problems early before they become big problems."

The same could be said for maintaining conservation practices. Conservation work shouldn't be a "fix it and forget it" mentality; the practices installed on your farm or ranch need to be maintained to assure they provide the benefits they were designed for; with proper maintenance your conservation practices will last for years and years.

Now that harvest is over, take a walk or drive through your fields; check those waterways, terraces, grade stabilization structures and ponds. Re-seed bare spots in waterways, fertilize grass, remove silt bars, remove trees, fill rodent holes. For terraces, inspect the ridges and channels, especially after heavy rains, fill rodent holes, make sure terrace height is maintained. And clean out the channels if needed. Concrete structures need to be inspected. Cut down any small trees and treat the stumps, repair damage made by rodents as soon as possible. Don't forget to check your ponds including the spillway or outlet pipe and remove debris that might clog your intake and cut trees and treat the stumps.



Not sure what to do? Consult with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS); they can provide you with more information on how to maintain your conservation practices. Regular maintenance will protect your conservation investment!

And remember when your folks said, "money doesn't grow on trees?" With the cost of everything going up, we need to maintain and repair what we have; spending a little time and money on maintenance of your conservation practices each year will help you save money in the long run!

Conservation is just like friendships; both require nurturing and attention.
~ Victoria Adenson
"No occupation is so delightful to me as the culture of the earth, no culture comparable to that of the garden...But though an old man, I am but a young gardener."
~ Thomas Jefferson

Kansas Flint Hills Smoke Management

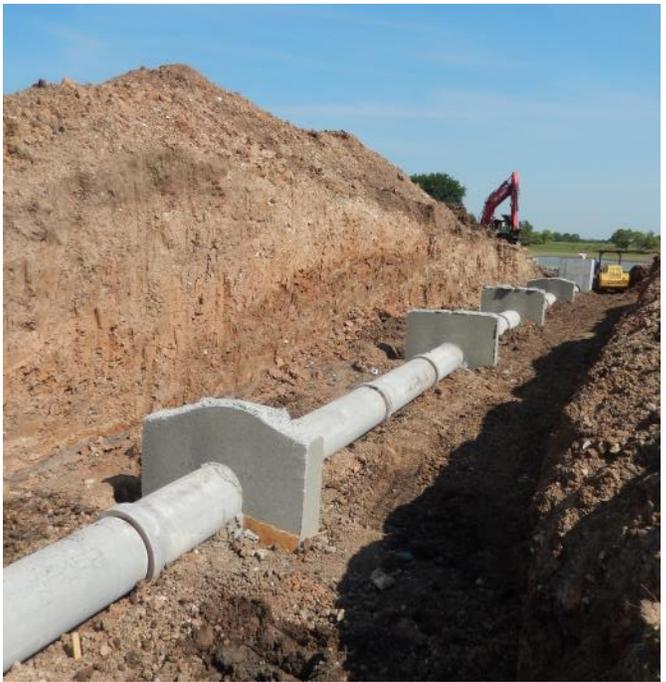
The development of the Flint Hills Smoke Management Plan is an attempt to balance the need for prescribed fire in the Flint Hills with the need for clean air in downwind communities.

The plan does not include any provisions that restrict the burning of grasslands in the Flint Hills. Instead, the plan takes a voluntary approach toward improving air quality during the burn season. The plan's voluntary approach leaves flexibility in the hands of the land manager but also puts the responsibility on him or her to make wise decisions.



The plan and website are cooperative efforts of countless persons with many perspectives on Flint Hills burning. We encourage land managers to use the site and to provide feedback on organization, content, ease of use, and ways in which the site can be improved for the next burn season.

www.ksfire.org



A principal spillway pipe replacement was completed in the summer of 2021 on a Whitewater River Watershed dam. The corroded corrugated metal pipe was replaced with a concrete pipe. The Kansas Department of Agriculture/Division of Conservation Watershed Rehabilitation Program provided cost share for the replacement.



When you use the Conservation District's no till drills, root plow, or purchase geotextile or flags, you help support our education and information programs? Thank you!

"Cherish the natural world, because you're a part of it and you depend on it." ~ Sir David Attenborough

Geo-Textile Fabric

The Conservation District has geo-textile fabric for sale. The fabric comes in a 15 foot width and you can order as many feet as you need. It is \$2.80 per square yard.



Marking Flags

If you need some flags we sell them for \$7.50/100 count. They come in white, blue and pink.

I never considered a difference of opinion in politics, in religion, in philosophy, as cause for withdrawing from a friend." ~ Thomas Jefferson

Rent the District's No-Till Drills!



The Conservation District has four Great Plains Model 1006NT No-till Drills for rent. They are 13 feet wide with a 10 foot planting width. Three have 3 seed boxes and 1 has 2 seed boxes with capability to drill seed crops, brome, native grass and small seed such as wildflowers.

The drills have a single hitch and hydraulic lift. A 70 horsepower tractor or bigger is recommended for pulling in the field. You can pull it behind your truck when you pick it up. These drills rent for \$9.50 an acre with a 10 acre minimum (\$95 minimum charge).

Make reservations now to attend Butler County Conservation District's 76th Annual Meeting at 6 PM on Thursday, February 3, 2022 at The Benton Church, Benton, Kansas. RSVP required! Please call 316-320-3549. Please RSVP before January 28, 2022. **Note: Due to COVID-19 restrictions, we will follow state and local guidelines and respect the guidelines set forth by The Benton Church.**

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Butler County Conservation District is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Conservation District Staff



L-R—Carey Fieser—NRCS Soil Conservation Technician
Justin Kneisel—NRCS Supervisory District Conservationist
Holly Edmundson—PBP Contract Clerk
Brandi McCoy, Private Land Conservationist (Pheasants Forever/Quail Forever)
Sandy Koontz—Conservation District Manager
Jeff Parks—NRCS/Kansas Department of Agriculture/Division of Conservation Technician

Conservation is a cause that has no end. There is no point at which we will say our work is finished. ~Rachel Carson

The soil is the great connector of lives, the source and destination of all... Without proper care for it, we can have no life. ~ Wendell Berry

Conservation is ethically sound. It is rooted in our love of the land, our respect for the rights of others, our devotion to the rule of law. ~ Lyndon B Johnson

What a country chooses to save is what a country chooses to say about itself. ~ Mollie Beattie



Root Plow

Don't push out those hedge rows! We have a root plow. There is a \$25 charge to use the root plow.



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Kansas Livestock Foundation and Cargill Partner to Help Producers Rebuild After Devasting fires in Western Kansas

Cargill has donated \$100,000 to the Kansas Livestock Foundation (KLF), the charitable arm of the Kansas Livestock Association (KLA), to help with relief efforts underway for producers impacted by the weather events of December 15, 2021. These and other funds will be used to purchase fencing supplies, feed and other priority needs identified by local KLA leadership in counties affected by severe weather and wildfires that burned nearly 400,000 acres. Livestock producers in the hardest hit areas lost fence, livestock and feed resources. Homes and outbuildings also were among the losses. To donate, go to www.kla.org and click on the KLF wildfire relief link. Checks can be sent to KLF, 6031 SW 37th Street, Topeka, KS 66614. KLF has a proven process to equitably distribute funds collected, with every dollar donated going to those Kansas producers impacted by the recent weather event. KLF was established in 1983 to operate solely and exclusively for charitable, scientific and educational purposes that advance the interests of the Kansas livestock industry.

Flood Control Dams Provide Benefit

On the evenings of Thursday, June 24 and Friday, June 25, 2021, up to ten inches of rain fell in areas of Kansas, causing local flooding. Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has assisted local sponsors to install floodwater retarding structures in many of these areas.

Over the period of Thursday, June 24 through Saturday, June 26 these flood control dams provided an estimated \$4,885,000 in benefits in Kansas. These benefits are the monetary value of damages that would have occurred had the flood control measure not been in place.

Some of the benefits estimated were \$440,000 in Brown County, \$250,000 in Rush County, **\$1,085,000 in Butler County**, \$935,000 in Harvey County, \$680,000 in Chase County, \$300,000 in Elk County, and other numerous counties. These benefits are calculated by a National Watershed Benefits Model developed by NRCS. This model uses radar estimated rainfall to calculate benefits daily for 11,845 NRCS assisted flood control dams nationwide. 831 of these dams are located in Kansas.

These flood control dams were installed by local watershed districts with assistance from NRCS. Local sponsors are responsible for operating and maintaining the dams, some of which have been in place over 50 years, to assure their safe operation.

Karen A. Woodrich, State Conservationist, said, "These dams are out there performing a function that goes largely unnoticed, but when we receive high intensity rainfalls like we have had recently, they function and quietly do their job of slowing down flood flows."





Top Five Reasons to “Root” for Soil Health

Ron Nichols, Natural Resources Conservation Service

5. A lot of people are coming to dinner. We all rely on the soil for our food and fiber. By the year 2050, an estimated 9 billion people will join us at Earth’s dinner table, meaning we’ll have to grow as much food in the next 40 years as we have in the past 500.

The Soil Health Solution: Improving soil health increases the productivity and function of our soil (including nutrient uptake to plants), which offers increased food security in a growing world.

4. There are fewer acres of land to grow the food we need. Globally, millions of acres of cropland are lost to development or resource degradation.

The Soil Health Solution: Improving soil health naturally can protect our working lands from erosion and desertification and ensure that our food-producing acres stay fertile and productive.

3. Weather extremes like drought and climate change pose increasing food production challenges.

The Soil Health Solution: Healthy soil is more resilient soil, with greater infiltration and water-holding capacity, which make farms more resistant to periods of drought. And since it holds more water, healthy soil helps reduce flooding during periods of intense rainfall.

2. There is growing competition for water and other food production resources — and many resources are limited (or in some cases finite) in their supply.

The Soil Health Solution: Healthy soils help optimize those inputs and maximize nutrient use efficiency. In addition, healthy soil keeps production inputs like fertilizers and pesticides on the land and out of our streams, lakes and oceans.

1. We can repair and rebuild it. For years, it was believed that a certain amount of cropland soil erosion was inevitable.

The Soil Health Solution: By using conservation techniques like cover crops, no-till and diverse crop rotations, an increasing number of farmers are proving that we can actually build our soils — and, in some instances, increase soil organic matter by as much as 3-4 percent. In the process, farmers are actually using less energy, maintaining or increasing production and improving their bottom lines.

Learn more about the basics and benefits of soil health and how NRCS is helping our nation’s farmers. Search online with the keywords, NRCS, Soil Health.

SOIL — DIG A LITTLE ~ LEARN A LOT

Fun Facts from the Kansas Farm Food Connection

Agriculture is the largest economic driver in Kansas, valued at more than \$62 billion, accounting for 43 percent of the state's total economy.

Did you know that Americans consume about 132 pounds of wheat flour per person each year?

About a third of a steer is used for beef production. The rest of the animal is used to make by-products found in medicines, cosmetics, detergents, insulation, and much more!

The United States grows more soybeans than any other country and six out of every ten rows of soybeans are exported to other countries.

Compared with 50 years ago, pig farmers are using 41% less water to produce a pound of pork, with a 35% smaller carbon footprint.

One dairy cow can produce more than 3,000 gallons of milk in a year. There are about 160,000 dairy cows in Kansas.

Did you know that in Kansas cows outnumber people 2-to-1? There are almost 3 million people and more than 6 million cattle!

One bushel of corn makes 2.8 gallons of ethanol.

One acre of soybeans can make 82,368 crayons!

Know Your Water Rights—Water Law Basics

Jeff Lanterman, Water Commissioner—E-mail: Jeff.Lanterman@ks.gov
Stafford Field Office ~ 620-234-5311

The Kansas Water Appropriation Act protects both the people's right to use Kansas water and the state's supplies of groundwater and surface water for the future. The Water Appropriation Act affects all Kansans, whether you're a farmer or live in the city.

The law is administered by the Kansas Department of Agriculture's Division of Water Resources, which issues permits to appropriate water, regulates usage, and keeps records of all water rights in the state.

It is illegal for individuals in Kansas to use water without holding a vested right or applying for, and receiving a permit to appropriate water from the Division of Water Resources.

The exception is water used solely for domestic purposes - that is, water primarily used for the household, watering livestock on pasture, or watering up to two acres of lawn and gardens. No permit is needed for that class of water usage.

The right to use Kansas water is based on the principle of "first in time - first in right." In times of shortage, that means the earliest water right or permit holders have first rights to use the water. The maintenance of water right and permit records allows Kansas water to be apportioned fairly.

The Water Appropriation Act is Kansas law. Violating it can subject you to a maximum of six months in jail and a \$500 fine.

Why is it so important to follow proper procedures to obtain a water right and report use of water? One reason is to protect the investment in your right to divert water for beneficial use on your farm for irrigation, a feedlot, recreational reservoir, or in your municipality, water supply district, or industry. Another reason is to protect Kansas water resources for tomorrow and future generations.

The Stafford Field Office is responsible for monitoring and regulating the use of surface water and groundwater in all or parts of 26 counties (including Butler County) in South Central Kansas. Groundwater is the predominant source of water in the Stafford Field Office area. Most of the surface water usage within the Stafford Field Office boundaries occurs in the eastern third of the field office area, primarily for irrigation and municipal purposes.

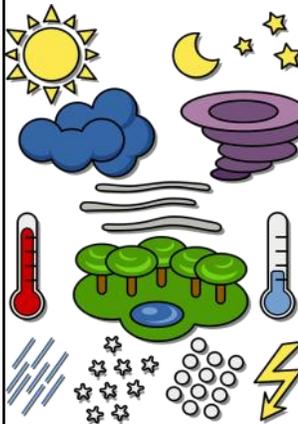
Some of the main responsibilities of the Stafford Field Office are: Enforcing the terms and conditions associated with water rights, monitoring short term and long-term hydrological conditions by means of groundwater level measurements and stream flow measurements, assisting the public with a variety of water related issues, distributing water based on priority in times of shortage, assuring that all water used is in conformity with the Kansas Water Appropriation Act.



An inflatable soil tunnel was used at the Butler County Ag Day south of Leon in October, 2021. The inflatable soil tunnel was borrowed from the Natural Resources Conservation Service State Office in Salina and Sandy Koontz, District Manager, presented information on soils to 316 students and 16 teachers.

Got Weather? Kansas Mesonet mesonet.k-state.edu

K-State Research and Extension weather stations are at the root of Kansas Mesonet. They work with the Kansas Water Office, Big Bend Groundwater District, the Equus Beds Groundwater Management District and the USDA Soil Climate Analysis Network.



Go to the website to find current weather information including temperature and wind speed. They also have agricultural weather, 24-hour precipitation, soil temperature, drought information and more.

Pasture Condition Score (PCS)

Douglas J. Spencer, State Grazing Specialist, Salina, KS

Livestock owners frequently assess the condition and health of their livestock using an assessment known as Body Condition Score (BCS). It is a procedure that looks at muscle and fat areas (energy reserves) to indicate the nutritional status of the animal. Did you know there is a similar procedure to determine pasture condition? It is known as Pasture Condition Score (PCS) and helps land owners and operators determine the condition of the pasture resource. If the BCS or PCS assessments are not utilized, the manager risks missing a slip in condition that can quickly result in reduced production or extra expense trying to recover the loss.

PCS looks at ten specific indicators to get an overall condition score of the pasture resource. Assessing these individual indicators offer glimpses into the ecological processes (water cycle, energy flow, and nutrient cycle) and how they are functioning in the pasture environment. Just like the livestock owner has a BCS guide indicating the areas to assess on the animal and a rating to assess the proper thickness of muscle and fat, a PCS scoresheet exists to identify the specific indicators to assess in the pasture and the desired ratings for each. The indicators to assess are percent desirable plants, percent legume, live plant cover, plant diversity, plant residue and litter, grazing utilization and severity, livestock concentration areas, soil compaction and soil regenerative features, plant vigor, and erosion.

For any assessment to provide valuable results, it has to be completed on the appropriate subject. Livestock producers do not use a BCS for sheep to properly rate beef cattle because the animal and ratings are different. In Kansas, we have both pasture and rangeland that provide forage for livestock grazing. Pasture includes introduced forages, such as smooth brome, tall fescue, and bermudagrass. Pastures, unlike rangeland, receive periodic renovation and cultural treatments, such as interseeding, fertilization, mowing, weed control, and may be irrigated. While many rangeland fields are referred to as "pastures," the PCS is not designed for range assessment. The range resource is evaluated with a Rangeland Health Assessment (RHA) and more information can be found at your local NRCS office or conservation district office.



BCS for livestock is often completed during designated stages of production (calving, breeding, maintenance, etc.) so grazing and feeding decisions can be made. Designated periods to conduct PCS include: as a benchmark condition of the pasture, early in the growing season before grazing events occur, at peak forage supply periods, at low forage supply periods, at plant stress periods (such as drought or very wet conditions), and when conservation practices (management) have been fully applied.

Conducting a PCS can help identify the underlying problems and/or provide answers to various questions with regards to pasture management. What plants are capturing solar energy? Are these plants desirable to my grazing livestock? Why is that "weed" showing up? Why are the cattle acting hungry when they have all of this grass? Why is the grass showing stress when we just had rain? Why didn't that fertilizer application give me the boost in production I was hoping for?

By evaluating and rating the various indicators, the land owner and/or operator begins to reveal the extent of any pasture challenges and what the likely causes are. Like putting a puzzle together, the land manager can now piece together individual indicators to create a complete picture of the pasture's condition. What would the pieces reveal in your pasture(s)? If you'd like to find out, NRCS provides technical assistance with assessing Pasture Condition Score (PCS).

For assistance, please contact the local NRCS office or conservation district office located at 2503 Enterprise, Suite B, El Dorado, Kansas. More information is also available on the Kansas web site at www.ks.nrcs.usda.gov. Follow us on Twitter @NRCS_Kansas.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

Question: What happened to the rancher who lost his cattle?

Answer: Nobody's herd.

Question: What do you call cattle with a sense of humor?

Answer: Laughing Stock

Question: What is the farmer's favorite Bruce Springsteen song?

Answer: Born in the USA.

Question: Why did the farmer bury his money in a field?

Answer: He wanted to make the soil rich.

Educational Events/Activities Sponsored by the Conservation District

4-H Conservation Banner Sponsored by the Conservation District

This banner, created by the Towanda Rustlers 4-H Club, received Grand Champion at the 2021 Butler County 4-H Fair. The Conservation District Sponsors the Conservation Banner Division at the Fair.



Conservation District 4-H Photo Contest

The Conservation District sponsors the Conservation Photo at the Butler County 4-H Fair. Lane Vanderford received 1st place in the 2021 Conservation Photo Division.



2021 Poster and Limerick Contest

The poster below was created by Clara Swinson, a third grader from Circle Oil Hill in El Dorado. The poster in the middle was created by Mila Matzen, a fifth grader from Robert Martin Elementary in Andover. The limerick at the bottom was created by Cosette Busenitz, a fourth grader at Berean Academy in Elbing. These were all first place winners in our poster/limerick contest in 2021 and were submitted to the state contest sponsored by the Kansas Association of Conservation Districts.



I see big trees
flying around trees are bees
let the trees grow
nice and slow
on the ground beside the trees are leaves

Poster and Limerick Contest Winners

The 2021 Conservation Poster and Limerick Contest theme was "Healthy Forests ~ Healthy Communities". Eight schools and 18 teachers participated this year. We received 309 entries; 308 posters and 1 limerick and paid out \$665.00 in prize money.



2021 POSTER CONTEST WINNERS

Andover—Robert Martin Elementary—Fifth Grade

- 1st Place — Mila Matzen
- 2nd Place — Emily Hatfield
- 3rd Place — Baylie Roop

Mila's poster was submitted to the Kansas Association of Conservation Districts State Contest

Augusta—Ewalt Elementary—Fourth Grade

- 1st Place — Chevin Edwards
- 2nd Place — James Schreiber
- 3rd Place — London Bridwell

Augusta—Garfield Elementary—Fourth Grade

- 1st Place — Paige Volkman
- 2nd Place — Adelyn Beardslee
- 3rd Place — Brantley Kenyon

Circle—Oil Hill—El Dorado—Third Grade

- 1st Place — Clara Swinson
- 2nd Place — Arley Watts
- 3rd Place — Avery Oliver

Clara's poster was submitted to the Kansas Association of Conservation Districts State Contest

Elbing—Berean Academy—Fourth Grade

- 1st Place — Libby Beagley
- 2nd Place — Logan Wray
- 3rd Place — Eliza Briscoe

El Dorado—Grandview Elementary—Fourth Grade

- 1st Place — Ava Cogan
- 2nd Place — Emmalin Drake
- 3rd Place — Landon Hull

El Dorado—Skelly Elementary—Fourth Grade

- 1st Place — Jaxon Martin
- 2nd Place — Kaleb Alexander

Rose Hill Intermediate—Fourth Grade

- 1st Place — Kinslee Dold
- 2nd Place — Alexis Linot
- 3rd Place — Lena Roehrman

2021 LIMERICK WINNER

Elbing—Berean Academy—Fourth Grade

- 1st Place — Cosette Busenitz

Cosette's limerick was submitted to the Kansas Association of Conservation Districts State Contest

TEACHER AWARDS

Each teacher received \$100 for participating in our contest:

3rd Grade

Circle Oil Hill

Sara Martin & Taylor Hall

4th Grade

Augusta –Ewalt Elementary

Leslie Lewellen & Jason Puckette

Augusta—Garfield Elementary

Jennifer Cody & Jennifer Husselman

Berean Academy—Elbing

Amelia Quiring

El Dorado—Grandview Elementary

Jim Shum

El Dorado—Skelly Elementary

Brandi Marshall and Jennifer Gingerich

Rose Hill Intermediate

Emily Bastian, Tammie Classen, Kathryn Renfro & Stephanie Woodrome

5th Grade

Andover—Robert Martin Elementary

Shanie Rucker, Cristie Karber, Kelsi Barlow & Kaegen O'Donnell

Thank you for teaching environmental education in your classrooms!

Congratulations to All!



Our 2022 Stewardship Theme is,
"Healthy Soil-Healthy Life"

Butler County Conservation District
2503 Enterprise, Suite B
El Dorado, Kansas 67042
316-320-3549



**Conservation District's 76th Annual Meeting to be held
Thursday, February 3, 2022 at The Benton Church in Benton**

The 76th Annual Meeting of Butler County Conservation District is scheduled for Thursday, February 3, 2022 at The Benton Church in Benton. The meeting will start at 6:00 PM.

For reservations, please call the Conservation District at 316-320-3549 or email sandy.koontz@ks.nacdnet.net. Registration deadline is January 28, 2022.

Check out Butler County Conservation District's Website:
www.butlercountyconservationdistrictks.com

**2021 Key Banker Award for
Soil Conservation**

**L & M Ag Inc.
(Fred Langenegger and Joel McClenahan)**

2021 Grassland Award

Vestring Ranch



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