

Verne & Linda Hubalek Saline County

Management Intensive Grazing



Cooperator:

Verne & Linda Hubalek
Box 407
Lindsborg, Ks. 67456

Watershed:

Smoky Hill River

Water Quality Concern:

Run-off carrying soil and agricultural chemicals and fertilizers to nearby creek.

Demonstration:

- * Convert erosive cropland to grass;
- * Establish a management intensive grazing system; including alternative livestock watering system

“Our biggest problem has been establishing the grass stand,” Verne Hubalek explained about their 47 acre demonstration. Verne and Linda bought the land, which borders the farms belonging to Linda’s parents and her brother, in 1995. They had returned to the area where Linda was raised to be nearer family and start new enterprises. They have worked closely with Loren and Lester Johnson, Linda’s brother and father, in developing and managing the land and cattle, making it a multi-family project. Implementing a management intensive grazing system with an alternative livestock watering system was their goal.

“We could tell by the gullies that erosion and run-off were a problem,”

remembers Linda. The field slopes down to a creek which runs into the Smoky Hill River about 1.5 miles away.

“We planted alfalfa early in the fall of 95, followed by Martin tall fescue.” But dry weather conditions in early ‘96 killed what had looked to be a good stand of fescue. “Summer of ‘96, we grazed a mix of alfalfa, cheat and volunteer wheat.” They overseeded fescue back into the alfalfa as soon as possible following dry conditions.

With CWFPP cost-share in the spring of 1996, the Hubaleks laid the water line system and installed single strand high tensile electric fencing for 11 four to five acre paddocks. Each two paddocks has a riser and hydrant where a small tank can be located on



Above, in early 1996, water lines and cross fencing were established in fescue/alfalfa mix planted in 1995. At right, a year later, tour participants stand at the edge of a paddock while Verne Hubalek explains the grazing system and problems they encountered.



either side of the fence. Verne explained, “We’ve located the risers so that the steers did not have to travel over 400-feet to water, eliminating the problem of too many animals coming to the tank at once and creating a bare spot around the tanks.”

“In April ‘96, we bought 46 steers and put 30 on the 47 MIG acres, and 16 head on 40 acres of native pasture. We lost one to bloat, which taught us to shift the time of day we were putting them out on the alfalfa. We also used bloat block after that,” explained Verne.

According to Verne and brother-

in-law Loren’s records for that first year, the cattle on the MIG system fared better than the others. The 16 head, who were on the continuously grazed native pasture for 94 days, gained 1.62 lbs. per day. The 29 who were on the MIG acres for 121 days, gained 1.51 lbs. per day. “Although the per day gain was less on the MIG, the lbs./ acre gain was better on the MIG system,” stated Verne. Those on the conventional grazing system gained 61 lbs per acre compared to 108 lbs. per acre under the MIG system.

The year had started out dry, but by late spring, their concern was that too much rainfall and hoof action



Bison grazing on the Verne and Linda Hubalek pasture is the latest chapter in their efforts to develop a profitable farm enterprise while protecting soil and

would damage their new grass stand. They found though that the paddocks were more durable than they expected. "There was very little run-off," commented Loren. Even their sacrifice paddock weathered the rains well. "Infiltration actually appeared to have improved with the grass and hoof action."

A financial analysis comparing the Hubalek's grazing system to the old cropping system for milo and wheat found that the grazing system came out ahead. Using KSU Farm Management data and 5-year price averages for crops and cattle (and figuring for 35 head of cattle), the Hubalek's calculated that the net income per acre (before land cost) more than doubled between milo and the MIG system, and was nearly 3.5 times the net income off wheat.

In addition to the economic benefits, the new system will also improve local stream water quality. "This would have been wheat or milo if we had not converted it to pasture," stat-

ed Linda Hubalek. "Therefore, we've avoided use of the herbicides and fertilizers that used to be applied here."

By 1998, the Hubalek's were grazing 60 head of steers on the MIG acres. "We produced around 420 pounds of beef per acre that year," relates Verne.

But like many CWFPP participants, the Hubalek's innovation did not really stop once they reached their demonstration goals. In 1999, after studying and researching, they bought their first bison bull calves. "We were looking for something that might generate more profit," Linda explains. In March 1999, 40 head of bison bull calves arrived. Since then they have started developing a cow herd as well.

The Hubaleks have developed a market for bison meat, selling all of it via internet sales and through direct sales at the Salina Farmers' Market.

The Hubaleks also continue to experiment with pest control by releasing praying mantis eggs to feed on alfalfa weevil larvae, and parasitic wasps to help control horn and face flies.

When Linda recalls the changes on this parcel of land, she considers what it was like when they first bought the acreage. "It was a grubby looking wheat field littered with beer cans. Now we see an improved quality site that is attractive to the eye. It also has a much greater potential for generating income. And the ground absorbs the rain better."

"I can also see benefits that can't be measured in dollars and cents. We have many songbirds like orioles and blackbirds returning to our land. Snowy egrets just arrived to join the buffalo. It makes me look forward to the seasons to come."



Lester, (left) and Loren Johnson (center) listen as Verne Hubalek explains to a tour group the grazing system and water lines they designed.

Hubalek Farm Characteristics

Farm Size: 60 A. (11 paddocks of 5 acres each).

Primary Crop: Grasses and forages - fescue, alfalfa, rye and clover.

Livestock enterprise: Bison bull calves with development of cow herd in 1999-2000

Equipment: Tractor, borrow equipment from neighboring family members.

Seed: Martin's fescue, Kansas Common Alfalfa

Management Practices: Management Intensive Grazing

Livestock Management: "Lead instead of push"

Weed Management: Grazing practices

Pest Management: Ladybugs and praying mantis for alfalfa weevil

Soil Fertility: Limed in 1995 to increase pH prior to planting grasses; some fertilization in spring.

Water Quality Management: Convert erodible cropland to perennial grasses and legumes reducing fertilizer and herbicide use; implement a grazing system that rotates livestock through pens and provides an alternative watering system for livestock to reduce concentration of animals and wastes.

Marketing: All are sold by direct sales at Salina Farmers' Market or internet sales.