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## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Grazing Management Benefits Resources and Bottom-Line**

by Mark Parker

*Emporia, Ks.* - The same grazing management techniques that increase efficiency and enhance productivity can also have a positive impact on water and forage resources. That was the take-home message from a grazing workshop held recently in Emporia, Kansas where Dale Kirkham of the Kansas Rural Center challenged producers to “create a positive impact every time you go to the pasture.”

Kirkham, who is part of the Kansas Rural Center’s Clean Water Farms Project team, suggested that better care and utilization of forage resources can be the reward of simple, everyday steps.

Spreading out hay, for instance, minimizes manure buildup which benefits grass, water quality and cattle herd health, he noted. Placement of salt, minerals or supplements in under-utilized portions of a pasture improves grazing distribution and not over-grazing pastures provides important shelter for newborn calves.

A rancher himself, Kirkham added that feeding at different times, and in different locations, can prevent the degradation of specific areas in the pasture.

He also emphasized that livestock producers have the opportunity to improve water quality while aiding both wildlife habitat and grazing distribution by protecting riparian areas with off-stream watering alternatives. A range of strategies, from stream crossings and solar pumps to buffer strips and rotational grazing, can be beneficial to the sustainable production of livestock.

In the long-term, livestock producers have yet another incentive for optimizing forage management.

“If you look at the whole country, we’re going to have to be more efficient in the way we graze livestock,” Kirkham said. “We are rapidly losing our forage base and it’s going to be increasingly important to have animals that are more efficient and for us to handle forages more efficiently.”

Kansas State University Professor Emeritus Gary Kilgore offered producers suggestions toward achieving that goal. Kilgore advised that Grazers have the tools to extend the grazing season and minimize reliance on harvested forages.

The key, he said, lies in understanding the nutritional requirements of cattle and match-ing those needs with the right forage at the right time. In general, Kilgore pointed out that cool season species, such as fescue and brome,

are at their quality peak in March, April and May but drop in nutritional content in the summer months. Warm season forages like crabgrass Bermudagrass and native species can do an excellent job of filling in the summer quality gap, he suggested.

Summer grazing and cattle performance can also be improved by interseeding legumes into fescue and brome pastures. Red clover, alsike and ladino clover are the best candidates, Kilgore said, adding that interseeding legumes works best in cool season, rather than warm season, grass pastures.

A variety of summer annuals such as sudan grass and hybrid pearl millet are other warm season alternatives.

Producers also have a wide range of forages that can extend the grazing season when temperatures begins to fall.

Turnips, for instance, provide excellent short-term fall grazing and give producers a six- to eight-week window in which to stockpile fescue for later utilization. Winter cereals like wheat, rye and triticale can also be utilized to stretch grazing days further into winter and early spring.

Kilgore cautioned that selecting adapted species is critical to grazing success. “There are a lot of exotics out there,” he observed. “Please don’t plant a forage you’re not familiar with. A lot of forages are being brought in and promoted and you have to be very careful. It’s not uncommon to plant one of these miracle forages and have it disappear after the first hot, dry spell.”

The K-State agronomist also had recommendations for getting forages started and keeping them viable. “Get a soil test,” Kilgore emphasized. “That is absolutely critical, especially with the price of fertilizer today. If you don’t need phosphorus, you can’t afford to put it on but if you need it, it has to be there to get the most out of your nitrogen.”

Putting on only the amount of fertilizer that is required is important, he stressed, adding that producers need to be realistic about yield goals. Kilgore pointed out that approximately 40 pounds of nitrogen is required to produce 2000 pounds of dry matter. For cool season pastures, he suggested an N rate of around 50 pound but noted that, because forage utilization is higher in haying situations, a rate of 70-80 pounds of nitrogen is appropriate for hay meadows.

Kirkham also spoke to producers about KRC’s Clean Water Farms Project. The initiative includes a whole farm self-environmental assessment focusing on the impact of farm activities on water quality. The River Friendly Farm Environmental Assessment covers a wide range of issues, from farm and family goals to the effect of management practices on resources.

“We want you to rate where you are right now, where you’d like to be, and then develop a plan of action on how to get there,” Kirkham explained.

Because of the educational value of simply completing the assessment, producers receive \$250 for their participation.

“It really opens your eyes,” commented Don Walenta, a Butler County rancher, who attended the workshop. “I got a lot of value out of filling it out. When I was done I felt like I should have paid them for the opportunity. It makes you think about your land and how you manage it.”

The Clean Water Farms Project also promotes water quality protection through workshops, field days or farm tours and cost share assistance for approved water quality projects within selected WRAPS Watersheds. (WRAPS stands for Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategy; KRC works in over a dozen of these around the state.)

Paul Ingle, watershed hydrologist for Flint Hills RC&D, discussed funding sources for landowners interested in conservation projects. Traditional programs, he noted, include the Natural Resource and Conservation Service and local conservation districts. Throughout much of eastern Kansas, Ingle said, WRAPS watersheds offer cost share money as do groups such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ducks Unlimited and Quail Unlimited.

Ingle said projects that take land out of crop production and put it into permanent vegetative cover are frequently eligible for assistance, as are practices which exclude animals from fragile riparian areas.

The Emporia workshop included a grazer's panel featuring Lyon County beef producers Jeff Houck and Ken Reed. Houck discussed his cow/calf enterprise, focusing on the operation's efforts to minimize the use of harvested forages through alternative forages.

Reed, a backgrounder, outlined ranch projects to protect water quality, including fencing ponds and creeks, and relocating cattle pens to less sensitive areas.

The workshop was sponsored by the Kansas Rural Center, Flint Hills RC& D, Melvern WRAPS Watershed, Frontier Farm Credit, Lyon County K-State Extension, the Lyon County Conservation District and NRCS, and Lyon County Farm Bureau. For more information on the Kansas Rural Center's Clean Water Farms Project, log on to [www.kansasruralcenter.org](http://www.kansasruralcenter.org).

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