



United States
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Ohio CONSERVATION Showcase

ROTATIONAL GRAZING PROTECTS THE LAND AND BENEFITS LIVESTOCK

“I’m a rare and endangered species,” Mike Altstaetter jokes of himself when he explained how he, once an urbanite, picked up and moved to the country to become a farmer. In 1977, this migration was an even rarer occurrence than it is today. However, with his wife’s background growing up on a dairy farm, he thought he’d give farming a try. He decided to purchase 155 acres of pasture in Logan County, Ohio.



Mike Altstaetter looks over his 155 acres of pasture on a warm summer day.

The Altstaetter’s soon realized that for a grass-based beef cattle operation to be successful, intensive management is critical. Fortunately for Mike, District Conservationist Bob Stoll, himself a beef cattle farmer, had the technical knowledge, personal experience, and conservation program funding to offer the Altstaetter’s. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) provided financial assistance for implementing grazing management,

partially funding the purchase of electrical fencing needed to separate the many pastures used to rotate the grazing cattle.

In this management intensive grazing system, small sections of pasture are grazed for 2 to 3 days. The cattle are then moved to a new section of pasture to graze for the next time period. This rotating of cattle allows the pasture to naturally regenerate to be used again in the rotation. Lanes are fenced off for the cattle to move between pastures and to keep the cattle out of water bodies.

On the Altstaetter farm, McKeys Creek meanders through a number of pastures, posing an environmental challenge. The cattle need to be kept out of the creek, but the cattle must cross the creek to reach all the pastures. Through EQIP, a stream crossing was constructed to protect the creek bed from erosion and the water from excessive sedimentation. After the cattle cross the stream, the stream is protected by an electrical wire.



District Conservationist Bob Stoll demonstrates rotational grazing on Altstaetter's pastures.

Fortunately for Altstaetter, the acreage he purchased 30 years ago has an abundant supply of water. In addition to McKeys Creek, a natural spring percolates up in one of his fields at one of the property's highest elevation points. While this water is beneficial for the cattle and the crops, it also poses an erosion challenge due to its location. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) was able to provide a portion of the funding

needed to install a waterway to direct the spring flow to McKeys Creek without causing soil erosion.

During the winter and for special situations in the warmer months, a small area has been designated for feeding the cattle or for confining sick or injured livestock. Using EQIP, Altstaetter was able to install a heavy use pad in this area to minimize the intense damage and resulting soil erosion from the cattle's hooves on soft, muddy ground.



Cattle use the stream crossing to move between pastures, protecting the banks from erosion.

Both Mike and District Conservationist Bob Stoll are happy with the results of their conservation planning, both for the bottom line of the cattle operation and for the environmental benefits of the conservation practices.