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A voluntary partnership with private landowners

Celebrating the New Millennium

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Cover photograph: Forrest Ferguson (Dist. Conservationist), Charles Rice (County Agent), and Jerry Fleming (Model Farm producer) take core samples to determine the quality of recently baled hay.

MAKING HAY STAND THE TEST

Is there any difference between shelter stored hay and hay stored outside?

By Forrest Ferguson and Holli Kuykendall, NRCS, Georgia

Southeast of Hartwell, Georgia, in the upper Southern Piedmont major land resource area, lies an 87-acre beef cattle farm operated by owner Jerry Fleming. Fleming started his operation with a nine-head brood cow herd. Now managing 64 head, Fleming has been a beef cattle producer for 33 years. A conservationist at heart, Fleming is very particular when it comes to his beef cattle operation. Since he is always searching for ways to make his operation more productive, Fleming was very interested in the Natural Resources Conservation Service grazing land program and how he might use this initiative to take a more in-depth look at his cattle operation. So, the story begins as to how a talented and conscientious producer like Fleming came to receive planning assistance through Georgia's Model Farm Program…

The Georgia Model Farm Program was initiated by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in 1996 as a result of increased GLCI and Ruminant Livestock Efficiency Program activities in the state. The secret for success of the Georgia Model Farm Program and the livestock producers involved in it lies in the unprecedented cooperative relationship established between NRCS and the Cooperative Extension Service (CES). Cooperation between the agencies has blended production with conservation practices and is making the Model Farm Program a valuable learning tool for livestock producers. Dr. Holli Kuykendall, NRCS Grassland Water Quality Specialist, and Dr. Mark McCann, University of Georgia Extension Beef Cattle Specialist, work together with local NRCS District Con-

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MAKING HAY STAND THE TEST

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servationists and CES County Agents to select Model Farm Program participants that are willing to make changes to their own operation and then share the results of these changes with fellow producers. Operating out of a Georgia top ten county for cattle numbers, Fleming was approached to participate in the Model Farm Program by Forrest Ferguson, NRCS District Conservationist, and Charles Rice, CES County Agent. Fleming was chosen as a Model Farm Producer since he was known to be a leader in his community and quite capable of successfully demonstrating practices beneficial to livestock operations.

All of the key players in the Model Farm Program met with Fleming on his farm to document his overall production objectives, review current activities of the operation and to look for opportunities to make changes that would help Fleming's economic bottom line. *Economic production efficiency is the main objective of Georgia's Model Farm Program.* While conservation practices are never ignored, production practices are emphasized and take top billing when cost-share assistance is involved. To assess the efficiency of Fleming's operation, the CES utilized an economic summary survey to generate site-specific production cost statistics for the operation. The cost statistics were compared to average production costs for Experiment Stations and Master Cattlemen in Georgia to determine what types of changes should be considered for Fleming's operation. The comparisons revealed that Fleming was doing the right things for his beef cattle herd, such as controlled breeding, use of bulls with proven performance, and records based culling. It was noted, however, that the high costs for producing quality hay were not economical since Fleming's current hay storage methods left the hay unprotected after harvest.

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Fleming's new hay barn was constructed to store approximately 60% of his harvested forage.

With this first area of concern identified, the Model Farm Program provided assistance to Fleming to erect a 1900-sq.-ft. shelter to store approximately 150 1500 lb. rolls of hay. To demonstrate the difference in hay quality and quantity between barn stored hay and hay exposed to the elements, three bales of hay destined for each storage method were weighed, core sampled for quality, and tagged for identification at the time of harvest. Once it becomes time for the hay to be utilized (approximately 6 to 8 months after storage), the tagged hay bales from both storage methods will be weighed again as they leave storage and hay quality will once again be tested. This process was completed for at least two cuttings of hay during the 1999 growing season. Before and after storage values will be compared for the two storage methods. To get a complete picture of how storage method impacts hay quality and intake, the amount of wasted hay around bales from each storage method will be estimated by collecting hay roughage which cattle refused to eat. While researchers can anticipate the expected results, documenting the loss of hay quality from unprotected storage on a livestock producer's operation should go a long way in encouraging other producers to invest in proper hay storage facilities. In many cases, the value of wasted and deteriorated hay over an approximate three-year period can practically pay for the construction of a new hay storage facility.

Another practice that was identified to improve production efficiency on Fleming's operation was the use of a more intense rotational stocking system. Fleming's pastures will be overseeded with white clover, subdivided into smaller units and incorporated into a rotational sequence to increase productivity and utilization of the forage. Starting the Model Farm project with six existing pastures, subdividing will increase Fleming's pasture number to nine. Increasing the number of pastures in the rotation will allow a longer rest period for each pasture, result in more uniform grazing and allow Fleming to increase his stocking rate. Calves will be allowed to forward creep graze the next pasture in the rotation, providing these growing animals with the higher quality forage they require to gain weight. To support the rotational stocking system, Fleming will protect heavy use areas around hay rings and water troughs with geotextile and crusher run stone. Additionally, a stream crossing will be established to gain and protect access to pasture areas separated from one another by a small stream.

The Georgia Model Farm Program has allowed Fleming to address both production and conservation concerns on his operation. This project is sure to document the benefits of the practices implemented, not only for Fleming who will be able to observe the differences in the operation on a day-to-day basis, but also for neighboring producers who will be invited to the farm for producer field days and tours. Until then, Fleming, the NRCS and the CES will continue to promote proven and innovative ways to increase the production efficiency of Georgia livestock operations.

Oklahoma's *"NEW"* Grazing Lands Conservation Association Supporting GLCI in Oklahoma

By Steven Glasgow, NRCS, Claremore, OK

Oklahoma became involved with the GLCI effort in late 1995 under the leadership of Sandra Drummond and a handful of other interested individuals, organizations and agencies. A state GLCI Coalition was formed with a vision for improved grazing land management. Their main focus was seeking more technical assistance from NRCS and training for NRCS personnel. The initial efforts of the state coalition resulted in the creation of a state GLCI Coordinator position and 3 new Range Management Specialist positions.

After a couple of years, the coalition felt as though more needed to be done. Drummond recalls, "Our top priority was still to get more assistance from NRCS, but we felt that there was more we should be doing. We felt like we were stuck in the mud and not going anywhere. Active participation in our coalition seemed to decline and we didn't really know what we should do next." After a couple of meetings and much discussion, the coalition decided that re-building support for GLCI and re-organizing the coalition would help to bring new members on board in order to strengthen the coalition, bring in new ideas, and focus their direction.

They began by contacting the leaders of state producer organizations, agencies, universities and other key groups. These individuals got support from their respective groups and appointed a representative to serve on the state coalition. The coalition created a steering committee comprised of producer representatives and an advisory committee made up of agency leaders and other key groups with an interest in improving Oklahoma's grazing lands. The coalition grew from just a handful of active supporters to more than 30.

The new coalition began to focus on other issues such as education for producers, the public and youth; increased involvement from the research community; and beginning a grant program to help fund demonstration projects and educational activities. They felt the best way to do this was to create bylaws, develop a strategic plan, and to become a non-profit organization. So, in late 1998, the Oklahoma coalition officially became the **Oklahoma Grazing Lands Conservation Association** (OGLCA).

Sandra Drummond currently chairs the OGLCA. She and other members of the steering committee are taking an active role in moving GLCI forward in Oklahoma. Sub-committees have been established to focus on key areas related to the goals of the OGLCA. The OGLCA and NRCS have entered into a cooperative agreement that provides NRCS funding for the support of GLCI activities including the Grazing Lands Grant Program. Sandra is pleased with the relationship that the OGLCA and NRCS have formed. "Our State Conservationist, Ron Clark, has been very supportive of our reorganizing and the formation of the association. We have been given the opportunity to provide our recommendations on funding, staffing needs and other related issues." The association will continue to strengthen this relationship as well as develop new ones with other agencies and organizations.

The OGLCA is stronger and more focused on grazing lands issues than it has been in the past, but there is still more work to do. Accomplishments include increased technical assistance and training as well as increased public awareness through new publications, presentations and a GLCI display. Most importantly, OGLCA has increased support for the conservation of Oklahoma's grazing lands resources and owners. The future for the association will be to implement their strategic plan and focus on the goals of GLCI.

Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative in Oklahoma.

CALL FOR PAPERS

NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON GRAZING LANDS

DECEMBER 5-8, 2000 • BALLY'S LAS VEGAS, NV

YOU ARE INVITED !

Accepting abstracts for the following categories:

- **Building partnerships between agricultural, grazing, and urban communities**
- **Successful "cutting edge" management technologies for grazing practices**
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To submit an abstract you need to prepare a 400-word or less description of your presentation (indicate oral or poster). Include your name, mailing address, phone and fax numbers, and e-mail address with the abstract. Submit abstracts by mail, fax, or e-mail to:

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DEADLINE for Abstracts - APRIL 1, 2000

Abstracts will not be returned. Notification of accepted abstracts will begin in June, 2000. **Presenters are responsible for providing their own travel, registration, and other expenses for the conference.**

"THE CHAIR'S CORNER"

The National GLCI Steering Committee requests the following actions and activities to be undertaken by each state GLCI coalition:

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

Background – GLCI has been quite successful in gaining congressional support and some designated funding since 1996 in spite of severe budgetary constraints. NRCS in some states has taken very modest amounts of GLCI money and achieved remarkable results. Other states have accomplished little or nothing toward increased agency emphasis and support for grazing lands and numbers of trained personnel providing technical assistance to owners and managers of grazing lands.

Requested State GLCI Coalition Actions:

1. Study, list, and prioritize grazing land management needs and objectives for your state.
2. Meet with the state conservationist, state soil and water conservation board, and state association of conservation districts board to determine their current activities relating to grazing lands. Discuss GLCI priorities and objectives in your state. Encourage actions to address the needs and accomplish the objectives.
3. Request from the state conservationist a complete and accurate accounting of the specific uses and related dollar amounts of GLCI funding allocated to your state each year.
4. Report back to the GLCI National Steering Committee about successes that can be used as examples by others or lack of progress that needs national attention or support to change.

Cooperative State Research Education and Extension Service (CSREES)

Background – CSREES works in a cooperative and coordinating leadership role with all 50 state research and extension agencies without direct line authority. Historically, efforts to work with research and extension at the national level have been more difficult and less effective than with NRCS and Agricultural Research Service (ARS), which are agencies with line authority. State research and extension is more dependent on state funding than federal funding and is supported by private or corporate grants and contracts. Some states have developed a strong client support base to work for increased state funding while other states do not have that support from clients or the state legislature. Total state funding has decreased dramatically. In addition, dependence on grant funding often must address the grantors' needs rather than the state's priorities and objectives.

Requested State GLCI Coalition Actions:

1. Study, list, and prioritize grazing land management needs and objectives for your state.
2. Meet with the state research and extension directors to determine their current activities relating to grazing lands. Discuss GLCI priorities and objectives in your state. Encourage actions to address the needs and accomplish the objectives.
3. Work with research and extension directors to plan, coordinate, and implement efforts to increase awareness, support, and funding from state legislature for grazing lands research and extension activities in your state. Priorities can be directly related to efforts for environmental protection and management.
4. Report back to the GLCI National Steering Committee about successes that can be used as examples by others or lack of progress that needs national attention or support to change.

Together we can make a difference that will benefit our grazing lands, our nation, and its people.

BOB DRAKE, Chairman
National GLCI Steering Committee