

Finding CRP Variety and Perfection in Missouri

Near perfect weather greeted the 70-plus invitees who accompanied Missouri Farm Service Agency staff on a tour of four Saline County farms to celebrate 20 years of the Conservation Reserve Program in late June.

Missouri State Executive Director Tim Kelley greeted the crowd at the Saline County fairgrounds and introduced dignitaries who were accompanying the tour.

The tour visited four farms to study different conservation practices and listen to the owners or operators explain why they chose to participate in the program.

The first stop was a 60-acre farm owned by partners David Cramer and Mike Gremaud. According to the Missouri Department of Conservation, through CRP, the partners have "transformed this row crop production farm into a paradise for quail."

Cramer and Gremaud bought the farm in 2002, and since it had a cropping history, they looked into CRP practices that could improve the farm from a wildlife standpoint.

They installed filter strips (CP21) on the riparian corridors and seeded to warm season grass to provide nesting and escape cover for quail. They also planted grass on terraces (CP15) to provide a mosaic of nesting and brood rearing cover throughout the field.

Prior to 2003, there was one covey on the farm and another covey that spent at least some time on the property. After only one year, they had four large coveys.

The practices were so successful that they enrolled additional acreage.

On a 92-acre tract, owned by Mike, they installed several areas of edge-feathering and food plots using the Quail Habitat Initiative (QHI) cost-share program. They do annual disking, burning and overseeding legumes on general CRP; all of which is planted to warm season grass (CP2) or an orchard grass/timothy mix (CP1).

By leveraging cost-share opportunities and managing their property intensively, Cramer and Gremaud have seen some great quail management results in a very short period of time on their operation.

Across the road from Cramer and Gremaud's is the Dillon farm, the second stop on the tour.

Dan Dillon owns a construction business in Marshall, Mo., and has been a landowner in Saline County since 2002, when he purchased 54 acres for hay production and wildlife habitat. Last year he added a 240-acre tract to his operation. Then new tract consists of trees, riparian corridors and 202 acres of cropland enrolled in CRP.

The cool season grass planting (CP10) was in place when Dillon bought the farm. He said that CRP has helped to stop erosion on his farm and has also provided excellent wildlife habitat.

Since Dan is a recreational landowner and his primary emphasis is creating excellent wildlife habitat, he elected to begin performing mid-contract management practices to increase wildlife diversity on his property.

Dan signed up for the Missouri Department of Conservation CRP-BOB (that's short for bobwhite quail) program to further enhance his CP10 practice for wildlife habitat by installing several food plots, inter-seeding legumes into disturbed areas and by planting shrubs to provide woody cover for quail, rabbits and other small game.

The third stop was to see the Van Dorf farm and talk with operator Larry Pointer, who was raised in the Saline County area and has been farming for 35 years. Pointer's operation consists of 1,100 acres of

cropland that is planted with 500 acres of corn, 500 acres of soybeans and 40 acres enrolled in CRP.

This 40-acre CRP tract is enrolled in the riparian corridor-tree planting practice (CP22) and was installed in 2002. CP22 allows Pointer to slow scour erosion and stabilizes the creek bank. It also provides wildlife habitat while retiring marginal cropland. Pointer states that he is very happy with the way CP22 has addressed his erosion concerns while not cutting into his bottom line.

Following the Van Dorf stop, the tour traveled to Van Meter State Park to enjoy a ribeye steak lunch prepared by the Missouri Cattlemen's Association and sponsored by the Missouri Department of Conservation.

After the meal came the speeches. Missouri FSA State Executive Director Tim Kelley was the host and introduced the keynote speaker, Larry Adams, assistant deputy administrator for farm programs. Following Adams was John Hoskins, director of the Missouri Department of Conservation, and Dwaine Gelnar, assistant state conservation, Natural Resources Conservation Service.

The final stop of the day was at the J.R. Wade farm. Wade and his family are native to the Malta Bend, Mo., area. He has operated the family farm for more than 50 years. His grandson, Justin, joined him in 1996. Together they own and operate 3,000 acres of cropland. It is half corn and half beans, with an additional 250 acres of cattle pasture and 200 acres enrolled in CRP.

J.R. and Justin have taken advantage of filter strips (CP21), shallow water areas (CP9) and the wetland restoration (CP23) practices on their operation. J.R. feels like these practices have enabled them to retire marginal cropland and increase profitability on the farm, while creating other natural resource benefits such as creek stabilization, filtering sediments and pollutants and recharging groundwater. CP9 and CP23 have also provided excellent habitat for amphibians, reptiles and Justin's favorite - migrating waterfowl.



Suzy Moore, Missouri state office conservation program assistant (right) greets and registers former state Sen. Morris Westfall (center) and FSA state committee member Craig Westfall (left). Morris Westfall is also a former Missouri state executive director.



Exchanging greetings before the tour are, from left to right, Tim Kelley, Missouri state executive director; Don Fischer, chair of the Missouri FSA state committee; and Larry Adams, assistant deputy director for farm programs.



Saline County Executive Director Everette Wood (left), Larry Adams (center), and Tim Kelley study a large aerial photograph depicting CRP practices on David Cramer and Mike Gremaud's farm.



Michelle Motley, Missouri conservation program specialist, uses the back of a pick up as a stage to address the tour group on the first stop. The group is standing on the Dillon farm. Behind the group, across a gravel driveway, is the Cramer-Germaud farm.



Equipment owned by the Saline County Soil and Water Conservation District was on display at the first stop on the Missouri CRP tour. The equipment is available for rent to CRP participants to install and maintain CRP practices on enrolled land.



Michelle Motley (left) looks on as David Cramer (center) tells the crowd about how successful CRP has been at restoring quail on the farm he jointly owns with Mike Gremaud (right).



Gerald Hrdina, Missouri conservation chief, addresses the tour from the back of a pick up at the Van Dorf farm, on the second stop of the CRP tour. Larry Pointer (left) is the operator. On the right is Joe Alley, Natural Resources Conservation Service soil conservationist/forester from Cooper County.



Luke Skinner, a consulting forester, demonstrates his tree planting equipment for the group during the second stop. Behind the wheel of the tractor, is Luke's father, Dan.



Assistant Deputy Administrator for Farm Programs Larry Adams talks to the tour group following lunch at Van Meter State Park.



By the time the last stop of the Missouri CRP tour rolled around, temperatures were rising and the shade of the large sycamore was welcomed. Behind group is a CP29, shallow water area, and beyond that, a CP23, wetland restoration. Both features are part of the J.R. Wade farm.



J.R. Wade, standing in front of a small pond, or CP29 'shallow water area,' takes the mic to tell the tour what he likes about CRP.



The staff of the Saline County Service Center poses for a group photo. Front Row: Carol Benedick, Laveda Broyles, Donna Smith, Wayne McReynolds, Brian McCarthy, Brent Vandeloecht. Back Row: Everette Wood, Anita Elson, Donna Markes, Julie Asher, Steven Wansing, Steve Wooden.

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