

CONSERVATION PROFILES

“I want to keep every bit of water on my place...I want to maintain it so that it runs slow enough so that if there’s any sediment in it, it stays on my place and doesn’t go down the creek. I want clear water to go down the creek.”

Frank Austin



Shirley June and Frank Austin

Oklahoma ***Working Smarter for Clear Water and Healthy Cattle***

Work smarter, not harder. It’s a well-worn phrase, almost cliché, but it sums up much of the 50-year strategy that has taken Frank and Shirley June Austin from two dairy cows (Frank’s get-through-school project) through dairying and cropland to their current status: 170 cattle on 1680 acres with a stewardship ethic that has inspired hundreds.

Frank and June have gradually added acreage. “They seem to get a kick out of taking a farm and fixing it up to realize its potential,” says Duane Crider, local NRCS conservationist. They enjoy the challenge of revitalizing the resources condition and they try to do it using new ideas to cut equipment and expenses without cutting profit.

Frank has found, for instance, that less tillage in conjunction with split fertilizer application, has actually improved his wheat yields 10 bushels per acre. And since discovering rotational grazing he has saved lots of energy—both human and mechanical—while increasing both his economic and environmental status. With numerous fenced pastures the farm has forage more of the year, and less hay needs to be put up in the summer or put out in the winter. Pastures were established with native perennials, with supplemental cool season annuals. Rotating cattle also keeps the ponds from going dry from overuse, keeps manure well

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distributed, and prevents erosion near watering sites. The difference in production: Calves have *added* three quarters of a pound weaning weight per day with the rotational system. Careful record keeping, correlating rotation information with cattle performance, has helped the Austins make critical decisions.

June Austin has 122 acres in the Conservation Reserve Program planted to native grass and forbs. Together with rotational grazing, this provides ample space for wildlife such as deer and wild turkey. Since clearing 60 acres of eastern red cedar recently the farm has also seen a resurgence of quail.

Frank is often quoted as saying “it’s not how much you work, it’s what you do with the resources you’ve been given.” He and June share their views with others through conservation districts, publications, seminars and field trips.

“There really isn’t a major conservation practice in Canadian county that they haven’t used,” says Crider. “Frank has been an active part of the conservation community in this county since I arrived in 1975,” he says, “and there aren’t many people you could say that about.”

Native grass and forbs on CRP land, and removing invasive red cedar for quail are two ways that Austins are assisting wildlife on their farm.



CONSERVATION AT A GLANCE

Key Practices:

Rotational grazing
Cedar tree control
Crop to grassland conversion
Pipedrops for erosion control

Fencing
Ponds
Terraces
Livestock watering



Programs Used:

Great Plains Conservation Program
Conservation Technical Assistance
Environmental Quality Incentives
Program (EQIP)
Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

