



CONSERVATION *Showcase*

Kopriva Ranch Honored with Grazing Management Award

The Koprivas raise registered and commercial Angus cattle on their ranch near Raymond, in Clark County. Jim and Karen Kopriva and their family hosted a tour of their ranch in July 2009 in recognition of their receiving an Excellence in Grazing Management Award. The Society for Range Management (SRM), South Dakota Section, asks award winners to



showcase their operations. Topics of the Kopriva tour included native grass seeding and management, using prescribed burning on native grass for weed control, cool season pasture management, how grass grows and why anyone should care, freeze-proof tank utilizing geothermal heat, electric wire fencing, and rotational grazing.



Jim and Karen Kopriva have been using a rotational grazing system since 1984 to manage their pas-

tures to meet their operation's business goals. They have about 1,200 acres of native rangeland, seeded pastures, and hayland which they use to maintain a herd of about 250 cows and 75 yearlings. "According to the vegetation in the pastures, I could increase the stocking numbers," says Kopriva, "But I'm not comfortable with that. I'd rather take the pressure off the pastures in the fall and use corn stalks." Healthy grassland and biodiversity with a primary goal of grazing longer and depending less on harvested and purchased feed are emphasized in their system. The Koprivas have used technical assistance and conservation programs to install two water lines, five dams, ten dugouts, and two developed springs.

Other innovative practices include grazing cover crops and utilizing crop residue stubble to extend the grazing season, control burning native grass pastures and native grass hayland, and utilizing geothermal heat to help freeze-proof water tanks.

At the event, NRCS Resource Conservationist



John Lentz, Mitchell, gave the audience an overview of how grasses grow and provided some tips and techniques for recognizing the optimum time for grazing various species of plants. "Basically, ranchers can graze about half the weight of the plant without harming the plant's ability to survive," explains Lentz. "Grassland plants need a certain amount of leaf material to recycle sunshine into energy which they then store in their roots. Grazing management is the key to the amount of energy that the plant has available to regenerate itself next spring." Lentz says the Koprivas are doing a good job in using grazing to manage the growth of cool and warm season grasses in their pastures.



At one point in the tour, Jim Kopriva commented that he's happy with the changes in his pastures. "I feel safer knowing what's really happening out in my pastures. I'll take care of the grass and the grass will take care of us."

District Conservationist Jim Dylla, Clark, helped guide the tour discussions through native grass seeding and management, using prescribed burning on native grass for weed control, cool-season pasture management, electric wire fencing and rotational grazing. NRCS, South Dakota State University (SDSU) and district specialists were on hand to help identify various plants as well as to discuss management techniques. In one area, the Koprivas have converted 215 acres of cropland to native warm season hayland. "For us,"

says Kopriva, "there wasn't enough profit in the cropland, so we changed to grass – this fits our operation better. Plus," he said with a grin, "having grass eliminates worrying about the rising cost of fertilizer!" Controlled burning is a tool they started using as a weed control practices which helps with changes in species dominance especially for reducing smooth brome grass in native pastures.

South Dakota Game Fish and Parks staff commented on how the Kopriva's grazing management is important and has benefited wildlife production. The Koprivas leave some acres on each quarter of land as habitat for wildlife such as whitetail and mule deer, ducks, geese, grouse, partridge, pheasant, coyotes, fox, hawks and owls.



These acres include a tree belt, water, slough, and an extra-wide fence row. Strips are left in the hayland to catch and hold snow.

The Koprivas, specifically their son Lee, was featured in an article in the Tri-State Livestock News: Next Generation Rancher Committed to Quality Genetics.

