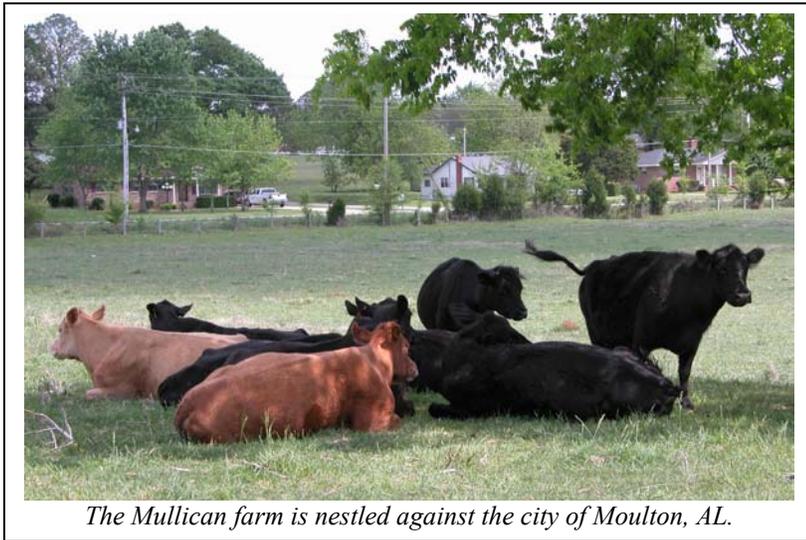


**Thirsty Animals** by Julie A. Best, Public Affairs Specialist, USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, Auburn, AL

One of the beauties of living in small towns across Alabama is the advantage of having the best of two worlds—the country and the municipality. Randel Mullican of Moulton, Alabama, can attest to that fact. Mr. Mullican has a small farm nestled right in the backdoor of the city of Moulton. No doubt that is an advantage to Mr. Mullican since he is the District Court Judge for Lawrence County—he can be at home on the farm one minute and in the court room in a matter of minutes.



Mr. Mullican has a cattle operation and a good, clean, convenient source of water for the cattle was an issue in the back pasture. There was a pond in the pasture, but over a period of time, the banks had become eroded. According to Mullican, the pond didn't hold water

very well either. Mullican contacted the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to determine if there was assistance for repairing the old pond or building a new pond. Mullican had two objectives. "I needed a water supply for the cattle and I wanted a pond that was aesthetically pleasing to look at," he said.

Jamie Carpenter, Soil Conservationist with NRCS, worked with Mullican to determine what could be done. Mullican applied for assistance from the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is a voluntary program administered by NRCS that provides assistance to farmers who face threats to soil, water, air, and related natural resources on their land. According to Carpenter, "We talked with the landowner to determine where he wanted the pond. We considered the old pond site, but the old pond was not holding water; we were

afraid that we would spend the money and be in the same situation. Sometimes that's a bad situation: when you have a pond that doesn't hold water and you try to fix it."

Since aesthetics was one of Mullican's objectives, Carpenter started looking for pond sites that would be visible from the front of the house. "We began by boring soil cores with an auger to see what kinds of soil we had to work with," said Carpenter. There did not appear to be suitable soil types in the front area, so they moved to the area back of the house. Using the Lawrence County Soil Survey as a tool to identify soil, Carpenter identified an area that appeared to have the clay content needed to support a pond. Carpenter did four soil samples on the area. "The soil contained adequate clay to support a pond, and we hit water at about 4-5 foot on all four borings," said Carpenter. We decided to close the old pond site and build a new one.



NRCS laid out the pond according to NRCS design standards for the number of cattle on the farm. Carpenter said, "We went slightly larger than that because the landowner wanted it, and he paid the difference between what the standards called for and the designed size of the pond."

Once the new pond was laid out, the landowner's contractor went to work. He closed the old pond and dug the new one. The landowner planted the critical areas with Bermuda grass, with a little brown top millet in it for the wildlife. To ensure that the pond provided a source of good, clean water, the pond was fenced and a livestock access ramp was installed. The cows are not allowed to wade all over the pond. The lack of shade discourages the cattle from loitering in the area.

Mullican says, “Now we have a reliable, economical water source in both sections of the farm. During dry months in the past, we have had to use well water or city water as a supplement. The pond has cut down on that expense.”

The pond has a second benefit. “For the first time, I heard a loud honking noise this spring. I came out, and there were two Canadian geese that had landed on the pond. I see hawks down there all the time,” says Mullican.

Eddie Jolley, NRCS Agronomist, says, “Good water quality is an important but often overlooked requirement for livestock. Allowing livestock direct access to surface water sources is a concern to livestock producers and to other water users. Cattle are more reluctant to drink dirty and bad-tasting water than clean water. If animals drink less, they will consume less dry matter and, as result, gains will be affected. In addition, dirty water can adversely affect the health and well-being of livestock.”

Mullican is pleased with the limited access pond. “The cattle found the access area right away. The water is clean and it has to be better for them than the water from the old pond,” he says.

Contact your local NRCS office for assistance with water quantity/quality issues.

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