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SERVING SOUTHERN GROWERS SINCE 1939

EQIP helps landowner with small acreage accomplish goals

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Water trough has a cut-off valve that enables the landowner to control the water flow.



NRCS District Conservationist Steve Yelverton, left, and Mr. Manning stand by the well house which supplies water for the grazing managements system.

There is something in most of us that yearns to return to our roots. That's exactly what Mr. William F. Manning of Covington County did a few years ago.

Mr. Manning was raised on a small 40-acre farm just outside of Opp, Alabama. He lived there until he was 18 when he did a hitch in the Army. After military service and a stint at Troy State University, he lived in Florida where he enjoyed a career as a used car dealer. He spent nearly 50 years in Florida, but the desire to return to the home place was strong, and he followed that lead.

There was a small problem, however. The home place had been neglected for many years. Mr. Manning and his son, Frank, began the process of restoring the land to a productive piece of property. They were planning to raise cattle, so they fenced the entire acreage. They used a small stream running through the property as the water supply for the cattle. The stream did not provide adequate water, however. In dry seasons, it would all but dry up.

Mr. Manring thought the solution to the water problem was a pond. That would provide the water for the cattle, and he knew that cattle enjoy getting into the water to cool off. Mr. Manring was aware of the services provided by USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS); therefore, he contacted the Andalusia Field Office and asked for assistance to establish a pond. When the NRCS technician evaluated the pond site, he determined that aesthetically, it was a beautiful location for a pond, but the soils did not contain enough clay to hold water. NRCS began talking with Mr. Manring about other water source options. NRCS also introduced the concept of water quality as well as water quantity.

Mr. Manring had two water related problems—water quantity was inadequate and the quality of the water was impacted by the cattle having access to the stream. Where the cattle crossed the stream, the banks were badly eroded. Animal waste was also concentrated in the stream zones where it was polluting the water.

“We had a real problem, but we didn’t know what to do. We thought we needed to dig a pond. The folks from NRCS convinced us that what we really needed was good clean water,” said Manring.

To identify the landowner’s goals and to determine how best to accomplish those goals, NRCS developed a five-year conservation plan. The plan spelled out the landowner’s goals and what practices were needed to accomplish those goals.

The answer to the water quantity/quality problem was relatively easy. A grazing management system utilizing a series of water troughs, pipelines, and an existing well would accomplish the objective. NRCS recommended three paddocks with a water trough in each paddock. Each water trough sits on a 25 foot x 25 foot slab of 4-inch thick concrete to minimize the erosion around the water facility. A control valve allows the water to be cut off when it is not needed.



The water troughs provide a source of



The cattle were fenced out of the stream and a cattle crossing was installed.

To control livestock access to the stream, the stream was fenced off and a 196 foot long cattle crossing was installed. The crossing was constructed from geocell material. Filter cloth was placed under the geocell, and then the geocell material was filled with large gravel and topped with crushed-run gravel. “That’s the sweetest thing,” says Frank. “We had erosion on both sides of the stream. The erosion is gone now and we have a crossing that is beautiful.”

To accomplish all of this, the Mannings applied for and received financial assistance through the

good clean water for the cattle.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), a

program of the USDA-NRCS. EQIP is a voluntary program that provides assistance to landowners who face threats to soil, water, air, and related natural resources on their land.

According to Steve Yelverton, District Conservationist for Covington County, "It's always amazing how far cost-share funds go. I like to think of it as 'seed money.' In most cases, the landowner gets enthused about the improvements and they do more than they had planned." Mr. Manring was no exception. He said, "We planned for three water troughs, we stretched it to four, and we really are using five, but we have to hand fill the fifth one."

The grazing management system works well. Frank said, "The cattle have a good water supply, and it's easier to manage the cattle. They know what to do. They know when it's time to move them. On about the eighth day, they go stand by the gate."

Mr. Manring concluded, "We are creatures of habit. I knew about ponds, and I thought that was what we needed. I didn't know how the grazing management system would work. If it's something we don't know anything about, we don't like it—we're afraid of it. What we did, we needed to do. Now that we have it, I'm so glad to have the cows out of the stream. We have a better water supply for the cattle, and we have taken care of the erosion problems caused by cattle in the stream."

Mr. Manring has incentives to be a good land steward. He's glad to be back on the land of his roots, he enjoys working with his cattle, and he's making every effort to take acreage that had been neglected and make it productive once again. Manring's philosophy on stewardship says, "Not only is it pleasing to the eye, but it's the right thing to do." Mr. Manring would be quick to tell you, "You can go home again!"

Persons interested in participating in the EQIP program should contact their local NRCS office. Applications are taken on a continuous sign-up basis.
