

Iowa CONSERVATION Showcase

Kirkman Farmer Relocates Feedlot to Prevent Runoff

Kirkman, Ia. – Perpetual runoff problems from Brandt Ferry’s 150-head cattle feedlot left him with two choices: permanently fix runoff issues or move the feedlot to a different location. After careful consideration, he decided the best way to manage his operation was to move the feedlot from one section of his farm to another.

Ferry owns and operates Pine Ridge Land & Livestock in Kirkman, just northeast of Harlan in Shelby County. He completed the feedlot relocation in 2002. “It made sense to move the feedlot because of the runoff issues,” he said. “I wanted to do the right thing and I wanted to do something permanent.” Ferry also expanded the feedlot to 4.5 acres from two acres. And he now has 500 head of cattle.

Professional Assistance

To ensure his newly constructed feedlot is environmentally safe, Ferry received assistance from a technical service provider (TSP) through the USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to complete a Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan (CNMP) to help better manage manure and organic by-products. A CNMP combines conservation practices and management activities that, when implemented, will achieve the goal of the producer and protect or improve water quality.

“I didn’t even know exactly what a CNMP was when I contacted the NRCS about installing a structure to stop



Brandt Ferry

runoff,” said Ferry. “Looking back now, the CNMP has helped me better manage my operation.”

The CNMP component that helps Ferry the most is nutrient management, where annual soil tests tell him what areas of his 1,100 acres of cropland need the most and least fertilizing. “Soil testing has been the most beneficial. I know where to stay away from when I fertilize,” he said. “I put manure where it will do the most good.”

Tom Hurford, NRCS Area Resource Conservationist in Atlantic, says the nutrient management element of a CNMP actually helps producers save money, too. “As energy costs increase, so do fertilizer costs,” he says.

“Capturing feedlot manure and the nutrients contained in that manure for use on cropland is increasingly cost-effective.”

Another component of the CNMP that has helped Ferry is land treatment practices. Ferry’s CNMP called for the installation of a sediment-trapping structure below the feedlot. He chose to install a sediment basin to



NRCS Soil Conservation Technician Luke Zaiger (right) and Ferry talk about the sediment basin intake. The sediment basin includes a riser pipe with a grate around it to filter out liquids, and hold solids. The system uses a concrete pad around the intake to enhance easier cleaning out of solids for disposal.

collect solids from the beef feedlot, and a grassed waterway to catch flows from the outlet of the sediment basin intake. Ferry received 50 percent cost-share through the USDA’s Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) in 2003 for both the sediment basin and grassed waterway.

“I haven’t had any runoff problems

from the feedlot since we installed the sediment basin,” said Ferry.

Iowa NRCS Soil Conservation Technician Luke Zaiger designed and inspected the basin. Zaiger says sediment basins, like the one Ferry installed, are becoming more popular in Shelby County. He has recommended several since designing Ferry’s. “There is nothing new or unusual about sediment basins,” says Zaiger. “I think they are becoming more popular because farmers are paying more attention to water quality issues, and a sediment basin is a fairly inexpensive, effective solution to runoff prob-

lems.”

In addition to his cattle feedlot, Ferry has two 1,000-head hog confinements. He also farms 1,100 acres of corn and soybeans. His conservation practices include no-till, mulch-till, contour farming, field borders, terraces, and grassed waterways.

Ferry Featured

Ferry was featured in March at a water quality meeting sponsored by the Iowa Cattlemen’s Association, Iowa State University Extension, and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. The meeting was for cattlemen and open feedlot producers, in response to the discovery of several manure spills in Carroll County creeks last winter. Ferry was highlighted to showcase successful feedlot manure management.

“The meeting in Carroll had everything from ‘How to Plan an Open Feedlot’ to ‘Funding Improvements and Maintenance Tips’ to the ‘Economic Benefits of Manure.’ It was a great benefit to the Carroll County producers who attended,” said Ferry. “It was very well-planned where producers could pick and choose what they wanted to learn about.”

Another manure management/water quality meeting was held in Sheldon in April, and more are being planned across Iowa in 2006.

For more information about water quality and manure management practices, visit your local NRCS office or go online to <http://www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/nutrientmanagementtools.html>.

*Jason Johnson, Iowa NRCS
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