

Beginning Farmer Restores Grassland

By: Joanna Pope, Public Affairs Specialist

It took seven years, but Deuel County farmer Lesa Franken was ready to give up – give up planting wheat. After years of tilling, planting, watching the crop struggle to grow, and then the disappointing harvest, Franken knew she needed to do something different with her crop ground.

“The best yield I ever got was 10 bushels per acre. It should have never been broken out for cropland in the first place,” Franken said.

Franken turned to the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Chappell, Neb., for assistance. After visiting with Anita Nein, NRCS Resource Conservationist, Franken decided to sign up for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

EQIP provides landowners technical and financial assistance with the installation of conservation practices on agricultural land. Franken used the program to help her convert her 73 acres of wheat ground into native grass. Franken plans to graze cattle on the native grass after it becomes well established.

When Franken applied in 2005 for EQIP she was eligible to receive 90% of the cost of planting a cover crop and the native grass seed. At that time, EQIP provided up to 75% cost share, but since she had been farming for less than 10 years Franken was eligible for an additional 15% through EQIP’s “Beginning Farmer” program.

Nein developed a seed mixture specifically suited for Franken’s ground. It was made up predominantly of native grasses and forbs. Nein took a lot of time planning because of the difficult growing conditions of the site.

“I wanted to get species planted that best suited the soil. Getting a healthy stand of native grass established here will provide wildlife habitat, reduce soil erosion and improve water quality,” Nein said.

Franken has been pleased with EQIP. She would not have been able to make the conversion from cropland to grassland as quickly without it – if at all, according to Franken.



Joanna Pope, NRCS
(L-R) NRCS Resource Conservationist Anita Nein helps landowner Lesa Franken identify native grass species on her land recently planted to grass through EQIP.

“This wouldn’t have happened without EQIP. I would have just grazed the weeds and hoped that some native grass species would eventually come back. That would have taken years, and may not have happened at all. EQIP helped me get our grass established,” Franken said. ♦



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**- Lesa Franken,
Deuel County Farmer**

Helping People Help the Land

