

2004 FORAGE SPOKESPERSON CONTESTANTS

James Chestnut, Logan County

While growing up on a small dairy farm in Indiana, I always wanted to make farming a career. But when I realized that I did not have the resources to purchase the family farm when it was sold, I left home, joined up with the 101st Army Airborne Division, made 44 jumps and was sent to serve in the Vietnam War. Following that overseas combat experience, I felt fortunate to just be coming home safe and not in a pine box! I settled in Logan County, went into business, and, about six years ago I finally, realized my long-ago dream by purchasing our 300 acre rolling hill farm in North Logan County. This farm was somewhat unproductive with gullies, broomsedge, bushes, weeds, vines and a run down homestead. We lived in a house trailer on the farm for about 3 years while improving the farmstead.

We finished building our new house on the farm in 2004.

I still recalled my Dad, back home, simply looking over the fences and deciding what was to be done for the pastures.... The answer seemed always to be...applying any available manure, put down 100 pounds of 10-10-10 and scatter a little grass seed over the rough spots from time to time.

When I participated in the Extension Service's first state-wide Master Cattlemen's Course and began attending the County Agent's forages, hay, and beef production meetings, I soon learned that successful farm management involves, among other things, long range planning, including soil sampling, following soil test recommendations, sowing certified seed, rotational grazing, cutting and storing hay according to research guidelines.

I developed a strategic farm plan that included the matching of forages to the unique characteristics of the lay of the land and the efficient production and utilization of these forages through the cattle.

For the past six years I have had a 120+ crossbred beef cow herd divided into spring and fall calving herds. Purebred sires, selected according to EPD requirements, were used and the calves were backgrounded. Stockers were sold direct to farmer feedlots and/or marketed through the Logan County CPH-45 graded calf sale. I helped reestablish this local feeder calf sale during my term as president of the Logan County Cattlemen's Association a few years ago.

I soil test the fields every two years, lime and fertilize according to recommendations. The 250 acres of pasture and hay fields are divided with electric fences into small paddocks for rotational grazing. Watering facilities are made available in each field.

I don't like to grow thistles and weeds; so as soon as the cattle are rotated out of a pasture field, I follow up with a tractor and bush hog to keep weeds under control. This year I have clipped some fields three and four times! I have even found that a cow will eat many varieties of weeds if they are kept cut down short and tender.

In early March, as I daily ride through the herd checking mother cows and calves, I begin spot spraying thistles with 2,4-D and continue spot spraying as long as needed throughout the spring.

Orchardgrass and fescue are seeded, no-till, in late August-September. I also renovate clovers into closely grazed pasture fields during this time. Clover renovating seeding in February and March has not been very successful on my hill farm. It seems that the clover will germinate okay, but about the time that the clover emerges into the crook stage, a killing frost will take it out. I may be sacrificing a season of clover production, but I usually get more successful clover stands by fall seeding.

I fenced the cattle out of the creek and with the use of filter fabric and properly sized gravel have developed limited access watering facilities that can be accessed from both sides of the creek as needed. These areas can also be used for equipment stream crossing. I did not apply for cost share funds for these projects when I determined that the Farm Service office cost share programs requirement was to fence off 85 to 100 feet of my best productive land.

Three quarters of the hay and pasture fields are in orchardgrass/fescue/clover mixture. There are two fields with 27 acres of Bermudagrass that is used effectively for summer grazing and haying as needed. I have found that by feeding Bermuda hay in the gulleys, amazingly the grass soon begins to take deep, elongated roots and, over time, tends to heal the open gulleys most successfully.

I renovated two tobacco/stock barns into modern cattle handling facilities. This provides much flexibility in managing and handling the cattle herd.

In an effort to cut back on haying, selected fescue pastures are fertilized with nitrogen in late August and held over for frosted down grazing in late November, December, and January.

In addition, this summer I changed cattle directions by selling the cow herd and began purchasing feeder calves for backgrounding during the spring, summer and fall months. My revised cattle program, when I reach my backgrounding goal for 2004-2005, is to utilize the abundant forage being produced through rotational grazing of about 500+ feeder calves.

An important lesson I have learned:

“Take care of the land and water resources on your farm and they will be there and available to take care of you and your farming operation when you need them.”

Jimmy May, Logan County

I intend to develop the idea of the rediscovery of eastern gamagrass as a forage crop and give a brief history of how it was rediscovered and developed for release by NRCS Plant Materials to private growers. I intend to cover how an idea to get the private cattle producer to use gamagrass for summer forage has been put into action. The results obtained by various landowners, techniques used and resulting hay yields or beef gains will be presented. What we have done in Kentucky will be compared with research findings in the southeast United States. My efforts at growing and processing high quality gamagrass seed will be presented. The growing of a new variety developed by NRCS Plant Materials and released for the southeast will also be presented.

Steve Meredith, Hardin County

I along with my son Alex, age 15, operate a diversified farming program near Glendale in Hardin County. Our enterprise includes grain, tobacco, alfalfa, and a cow herd of approximately 100 head which produces feeder calves. We also have a successful greenhouse business. Our home farm includes 160 acres and we rent and lease an additional 270 acres of crop and pastureland.

Bill Payne, Lincoln County

I would like to describe my transition from a conventional dairy operation to our current MIG enterprise. I joined my father in 1974 who at that time had been dairying on a 265 acre farm in Lincoln County, Kentucky for twenty five years. We fed our registered Holsteins corn silage and alfalfa haylage and purchased a manufactured feed. We also had about 120 beef cows on another farm of 450 acres.

In April 2000, I attended the Kentucky Grazing School held in Washington County. The grazing techniques presented there seemed to be much simpler and more in synch with nature than the drylot operation which we were employing. Not only did the animals harvest their own feed, but they spread their own manure! Perhaps the

most important advantage, it seemed to me at the time was better hoof health. I decided to move any future operation in the direction of MIG.

When my father retired in August 2000, I made a business decision to sell the dairy herd. I continued to raise the remaining dairy heifers on pasture as well as the beef herd. The operation was expanded by backgrounding purchased steers. In December 2001, I had the opportunity to become involved in a network of dairy heifer growers. I purchased 100 of these heifers from Michigan and began grazing them. In January 2003, I sold the beef herd and am raising dairy heifers exclusively. There are 400-500 of these heifers on the farm at a given time.

In order to better utilize the larger pastures that we had fenced, I installed temporary polywire fencing. At that point, water became the limiting factor. With the advice of Ken Johnson, Jimmy Henning and Dan Grigson, I drew a plan to extend waterlines around both farms. Bo Renfro, NRCS director in Lincoln County assisted by securing cost share money that enabled me to implement that plan, which included fencing off Hanging Fork Creek. State (Phase I) cost share dollars allowed me to improve our cattle handling facilities and to install feeding pads of geotextile fabric and gravel.

In addition to grazing our dairy heifers, we produce alfalfa/orchardgrass hay for sale. There were two barns available to store that hay on the former dairy. We converted two tobacco barns for additional storage. We raised 90 acres of alfalfa for sale this past year, while using another 80 acres for grazing and haylage.

While I have experience with corn silage, alfalfa hay and cool season grass/clover pastures, I have read about lots of new forages and uses for traditional ones. We have utilized standing corn as fall pasture after we conclude grazing alfalfa on September 15. Small grains such as oats and rye provide good fall, winter and spring grazing. We are trying turnips with the oats this fall. We drilled perennial ryegrass into a thinning stand of alfalfa this past spring. Stockpiling fescue is perhaps the best way to reduce reliance on stored feeds for winter. Our imagination may be the only limit to extending the grazing season.