

Out to Pasture: Soil and Water Conservation on Eckenfels Farm



Eckenfels Farm maintains a large herd of South Pole cattle that are mainly grass fed.

Previously on the blog, I've cited examples of [soil and water conservation programs](#) available to farmers that receive 50% of the funds raised by the [Parks, Soils, and Water Sales Tax](#). Thanks to wet spring weather in May, I was able to catch Bob Eckenfels of [Eckenfels Farms](#) in Ste. Genevieve, MO, for a farm tour and interview during a lull in his busy schedule to discuss some of these programs. In 1999, Eckenfels had his first experience with soil and water conservation funding from the sales tax; he hoped to develop a pasture management plan that limited erosion in his cattle pastures. Since then, he's used the program to install terraces for runoff diversion in his cropland, and to continue bettering his pastures. Eckenfels was so impressed by the successes of the Soil & Water Conservation programs on his farm that he joined the Ste. Genevieve Co. Soil & Water Conservation District Board. Today, he sits as Chairman of the Board, a well-respected spokesperson for both farming and the land in Ste. Genevieve, MO.

Eckenfels Farm transitioned from a traditional grazing system on its 100 acres of pasture to what Eckenfels called an "Intensive Grazing Plan", or rotational grazing system, based on consultation advice from [Ste. Genevieve Co. Soil & Water Conservation District](#). Eckenfels divided his grazing land into 20+ pastures of only a few acres each. His cattle spend only 2-3 days in a pasture before being rotated on to the next through a series of handy, fenced corridors that make the transition easy: simply open a gate, then guide the cattle through the corridors to the next open gate. As part of a "Grazing System Water Plan", Eckenfels fenced off each of the ponds found or built in his pastures and installed wells and freeze-proof waterers as sources of drinking water for his cattle instead. The results of the

new pasture management plan have been impressive: previously, Eckenfels' cattle utilized only about 30% of the land available to them; now, Eckenfels sees a 60-70% utilization of his land that extends the grazing season well into the fall. I noticed no damaging cow paths cutting through his pastures, the edges of his ponds were clean and dotted with wildflowers, and the pastures themselves were thriving and abundantly green. His cattle are healthier too: they suffer from fewer parasites, drink cleaner water, and no longer contract diseases of the foot from standing in ponds. I asked Eckenfels why he had first sought funding for his farm. He replied, "Well, I just can't stand to see any erosion." His care was apparent, as there was little evidence of unchecked erosion to be seen on his farm.



A young South Pole calf looks on.

As my visit closed, Eckenfels cited a few difficulties that farmers face today: low market values and rising land prices name just two. However, funds provided by the Parks, Soils, & Water Sales Tax help to ease some of the burden placed on Missouri's agriculturists by boosting production and minimizing waste on their farms. Vote YES to renew the Parks, Soils, & Water Sales Tax on November 8th! Missouri farmers, Missouri parks, and Missouri lands and waterways need you.