

2009 GRASSLAND AWARD WINNERS



Donald & Doris Cress

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Our grassland award winners this year have a long family history in taking care of the land in Morris County. Preserving and protecting the land is something Don Cress and his family has done for many years. This can be seen anytime you see his land.

The Cress family came to this area in 1883 from Ohio. Don's mother's side came from Missouri just before the civil war and moved to the Kelso area. Don's father Lonnie Cress, worked for Val Gessit who ran a ranch close to the Cress's. This is where Don's father learned about ranching and passed this to Don.

Don's uncle, Marvin Bird and his sister Lizzie Bird purchased 280 acres of land where Don and Doris live today. When they passed away, the 280 acres went into an estate. Don worked for the estate farming and running cattle. This was in 1937 and '38. Don will tell you that in 1936 the pastures looked like a table, no grass due to the drought. These pastures were left empty for 3 years and they came back well.

Don purchased the estate and started farming. In 1942 Don started to get into the cattle business, he bought Mexican steers. He made \$241.00 on 40 head. He and Doris used this money to get married and buy furniture for the home.

Doris's folks lived in the area south of Council Grove. Don met her by helping gather the neighbor's cattle that got out onto Doris's folks farm.

Don and Doris's operation grew and they started a cow herd in 1948. They have alternated from cows to stockers on their grass over the years. Currently Don double stocks steers. He has them on the native grass from the 1st of May to the 1st of Aug. He partners with Scott Denison on back grounding cattle now.

When Don started farming he knew the cropland needed protection, so he built some terraces with a two bottom plow. He said it took forever. In 1949 he bought a dozer and built some diversion ditches. He also had some dikes built around the creek after the 1951 flood.

Don has since seeded almost all of his cropland back to grass within the last 20 years. Don said he farmed long enough, and wanted to do some more conservation on the cropland and get some kind of return on the land, so he went to grass. He planted native grass on the uplands, and brome on the bottom lands along the creek.

The native grass is early intensively stocked. Don determines the grazing numbers based on the size of animals going into the pasture. If the animals are 550 to 600 pounds going in, he will usually have 2 acres per head. Don says the native grass recovers well after the grazing for the rest of the growing season. Don also adjusts as needed with dry weather.

The brome is usually used for hay production. He will put cattle on the brome in good years for a short term in the winter and still have hay production the following year. The brome is fertilized each year to keep production up. The best gains on cattle are when he puts stockers on brome in April 1st to 26th of April, then to bluestem. He has done this a few times, but this is only done when there is enough moisture and growth of the grass. Don says having the creek in the brome fields is a big benefit since he always has running water.

Don declared war on cedar and locust trees in his pastures about seven to eight years ago. The cedars and the locust trees were killing his grass. He started his brush control, and a few years later he signed up for an EQIP contract for assistance to control the remaining trees. He used a combination of mechanical and chemical brush control. These trees have now been eliminated.

He has had 4 ponds built over the years. He also had a spring developed. This was first done years ago with the CCC camp. They made the spring box and had a pipe and tank installed. Since then, the tanks have worn out and the system was redone.

Continuing with conserving the land, Don has done streambank stabilizations. The stream in his brome fields was cutting the banks badly and needed protection.

Don and Doris know what the land has provided them and they have always tried to protect the land. The fields show that they are well taken care of.

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