



## MENTOR PROGRAM HELPS FARMERS WITH CRP TRANSITION

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Newsletter

Larry Mason, his wife Rose, and his brother Monty manage a small family farm outside of Dixon, NE. Recently, over 100 acres of Mason's farm was given early release from the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Rather than returning the CRP acres back to crop production, the Masons decided to try intensive grazing. They believed that they could get the best return from their CRP acres through intensive grazing, but lacked the experience in this particular sustainable ag practice. "We knew what we wanted," said Mason, "but we didn't quite know where to start. We needed to see some sort of an example or find someone who could 'show us the ropes'".

Then, through one of the crop clinics sponsored by the University of Nebraska, the Masons discovered the Sustainable Agriculture Mentor Program. From the Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society (NSAS) membership list, NSAS board member referral, and county Extension Educator referral, UNL farm management specialist Tim Powell found Gerald Henzler of Pierce, NE. Gerald has had over 20 years of experience in intensive grazing practices. After an initial orientation meeting, Henzler and the Masons visited each other's farms.

It made little difference that Henzler grazed cattle and the Masons wanted to graze sheep. "The best thing about intensive grazing practices," said Henzler, "is that we manage the grass, not the animal. The grass may be managed differently with sheep than with beef cows, but the principles are the same."

"One of the best things I like about intensive or rotational grazing," added Mason, "is that it promotes weed management without the use of chemicals. The more the grass is used, the more productive it becomes and the less labor intensive it remains."

Although this is the first time that Henzler has been involved in the mentor program, he says that he enjoys the contribution that he can make to other farmers. He believes that gaining firsthand knowledge through the experience of others can be far more productive than reading about it or trial-by-error.

"The knowledge is passed on quickly through the mentor program," added Powell. "What we learn from here on out will also be passed on to other farmers. With so many CRP acres going back into production in the next year or so, farmers are going to need all the help they can get."

### ARE YOU INTERESTED IN NSAS BOARD ACTIVITIES?

Board elections are coming up, and we are seeking to nominate members willing to serve a three year term. Meeting times are scheduled to accommodate members, and the location varies. If you are interested in running for the board, please contact any board member or the Hartington office. Elections will be held at the Annual Meeting, on February 25, 1995.