Conservation

Cattle help with the mowing

By **GAIL C. KECK**

FEW things can be as destructive to a waterway as a herd of grazing cattle, but once the waterway dries out, those cattle can do a great job of mowing. The key is having a well-placed fence to keep them in the right place at the right time.

For example, Gene and Jo Baumgardner and their nephew, J.L. Draganic, designed their pasture fencing so they can rotate cattle through eight paddocks. One of those paddocks encloses a natural drainage channel that carries water after it rains but dries out in between. Grazing that paddock only during dry weather keeps the cattle from trampling the vegetation into the mud.

The Baumgardners and Draganic run a herd of 35 beef cows near Jeffersonville. Their pasture includes both rolling hills and flood-prone bottom ground. They built fencing to exclude cattle from the creek and installed two stock tanks fed by an artesian well. To build each tank, they used a piece of 48-inch concrete sewer pipe turned on its side with concrete poured inside to form the tank bottom.

WATER SOURCE: Gene Baumgardner (right) and J.L. Draganic (second from left) built watering tanks for their beef herd using pieces of 48-inch concrete sewer pipe with concrete poured inside to form the bottom. Eric Tipton (left) and Kubby Keller (second from right) helped.

Their eight paddocks are arranged so each paddock has access to one of the stock tanks, explains Draganic. Unfortunately, the water line from the well wasn't laid exactly on grade, so they sometimes have problems with air lock in the line. To move the water on through the air lock, they're installing a solar-powered pump.

Since the bottom paddocks sometimes flood, the high-tensile electric fences are wired so the lower sections can be disconnected, Draganic adds. That way the electric fence charger can still be used to contain cattle in the upper paddocks even if the lower paddock fence is under water. The five-wire high-tensile fence collects some flooding debris, but not nearly as much as a woven-wire fence would.

Keck writes from Raymond.

Thick forage holds on to soil

By **GAIL C. KECK**

MOST of the time, Muskingum County hay producers Joe Celuch and Brenda Butler keep the soil in their hay fields well covered with thick stands of forage crops. But every seven years or so they reseed their fields. When they do, they don't skimp on the tillage. They've tried various minimum-tillage methods and struggled to get good stands, says Celuch.

Now the couple works fields thoroughly and packs the surface tightly with a cultimulcher, Butler's favorite tool. "It makes it as smooth as a baby's butt," she says. With the final pass they leave rills perpendicular to the path of erosion, to reduce the flow of water downhill.

The goal is to get the tillage done and the crop up and growing quickly, before a heavy rain has a chance to do much damage. Planting into a finely worked, tightly packed surface is the best way to get quick emergence with tiny forage plant seeds, Celuch explains.

Choosing the right crop or combination of forages for a field is also important, Celuch adds. They consider the terrain, drainage characteristics and wildlife pressure.

For instance, crops on their low ground tend to start producing earlier in the spring, so they try to match that ground with forage mixtures that will give them an early harvest. For fields surrounded by woods, they avoid planting alfalfa because deer damage it so much.

Even though deer can cost Celuch and Butler yields, they'd rather not run animals through the haybine. To give creatures a better chance to escape, they follow an "inside out" mowing pattern. The first pass goes through the center of a field, and then they work chunks of the field from the center out toward the edges. The animals can move through the tall grass to the field edges.

SOIL SAVERS: Muskingum County farmers Brenda Butler and Joe Celuch, along with farm employee Kurt Bremer, have found that a thick, solid stand of forage is a strong defense against soil erosion. This stand of alfalfa was harvested 14 days before the photo was taken.

"You can see the rabbits escaping," Celuch says. Before, if rabbits tried to run away across the mowed ground, hawks often picked them off. Deer would bunch up in the unmowed forage in the middle of the field or hide where he couldn't see them until it was too late.

The first tractor pass through the field does knock down some hay, but if you come back and mow that section driving the opposite direction, Celuch says, the discbine picks it up easily.

REUSED: Gene Baumgardner used concrete warehouse panels to build this multipurpose barn.

'Recycled' barn walls

By **GAIL C. KECK**

THE concrete panels that form the walls of Gene and Jo Baumgardner's barn were originally supposed to be part of someone else's warehouse. However, the warehouse was never built, and the panels were left lying at the building site. "We kept seeing them when we were driving past," Gene explains.

The family tracked down the bank that owned the proposed warehouse and bought the panels.

The panels measure 12 feet by 32 feet by 8 inches and weigh between 15 and 17 tons each. They were intended to stand vertically, but the Baumgardners laid them horizontally and stacked one on top of another to form their barn walls. The bottom row of panels rests on underground footers and are sunk four feet into the ground. The walls are supported by H beams anchored in the footers.

To move the panels into position, the construction crew used a 90-ton crane, Gene explains.

For now, the Baumgardners, who farm near Jeffersonville, are using the barn for machinery, but it could hold as much as 80,000 bushels of grain.