

Nebraska

FARMER

The Magazine of Nebraska Agriculture

Conservation partners

At a glance

- Bluestem Valley Farms relies on conservation partners.
- Cost-sharing programs from agencies aided stewardship.
- Lyle Sittler has invested his own funds to aid soil, wildlife.

By **DON McCABE**

IT'S difficult to top the adrenalin rush of being a starter on the Cornhusker football team in the 1960s and then spending 10 years as an assistant high school football coach.

Yet after those experiences, Lyle Sittler was drawn back to the soil on the family farm his great-grandparents homesteaded in southwest Lancaster County in the 1860s. He and his wife, Alice, have spent the past 30-plus years protecting that soil and the other natural resources — water, wildlife and native prairie — that are all part of Bluestem Valley Farms.

Their continuous participation in conservation programs over the years illustrates that landowners don't have to go it alone when practicing stewardship. "We've taken advantage of many conservation and cost-share resources from different agencies," says Sittler.

Sittler and his son-in-law, Todd Eggerling, own and operate the farm, which consists of 1,300 acres of cropland and 800 acres of pasture. Eggerling and his wife, Kristen, live in a separate house on the farm.

Here's a summary of the farm's practices and the cost-share programs utilized over



STEWARDSHIP SUCCESS: Lyle Sittler's 30-plus years in farming have included a number of conservation achievements.

the years to protect resources:

■ Sittler no-tills corn and soybeans.

■ He and Alice sold a permanent conservation easement to the Lower Platte North Natural Resources District on 200 acres of virgin prairie, to prevent its conversion to housing or other urban encroachments. Sittler received a one-time payment for the easement, but he retains ownership of the 200 acres and can use it as he deems neces-

sary for grazing or haying.

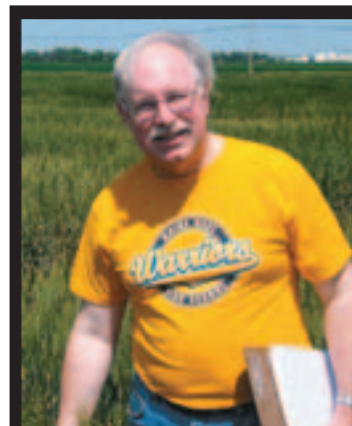
■ The Natural Resources Conservation Service's Environmental Quality Incentives Program granted dollars for rotational grazing, fencing and a watering system on a post-calving lot and a pasture.

■ NRD provided cost-sharing for tree plantings, including windbreaks and shelterbelts to protect cattle, soil and wildlife. Funds from the Wild Nebraska program, sponsored by the

Game and Parks Commission, also were used.

■ A new vegetative treatment system in a 40-acre post-calving drylot for cow-calf pairs holds runoff from a feeding area. (See story on Page 6.)

■ They installed a flow meter on their center-pivot system. "People need to use an appropriate amount of water and not overuse this resource to safeguard it for future generations," Sittler says.



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