2012 North Carolina Environmental Stewardship Award

I.

Sam and Linda Bingham
845 Baber Road
Rutherfordton, NC 28139
828-287-9198
sam.bingham@att.net

Nature of Business

Sam and Linda Bingham currently maintain about 75 cow-calf pairs on about 250 acres of forages. There is also about 50 acres of woodland that serves as stream buffers and wildlife habitat. The Bingham's market their cattle as pre-conditioned calves in truck load lots through the Rutherford County Pre-Conditioned Association. Sam also sells a few calves in graded feeder calf sales when the numbers aren't available to fit the marketing program.

History of Business

This farm has been in the family for over 60 years. Linda's father ran a dairy operation for 35 years before selling out and converting to beef cattle production in a partnership with Sam. After his father-in-law's death, Sam continued the operation and began to improve his genetics through culling unproductive cows and using high quality Angus bulls. He also began improving his environmental practices which have resulted into a high quality, environmentally friendly beef cattle operation.

Natural Resources on the Farm

The pasture and hay land consist mainly of fescue and clover, but Sam also manages grazing around warm season forages such as crabgrass, dallisgrass and common Bermuda. This forage management helps to promote grazing throughout most of the year. Over the past few years, he has been in the process of improving pastures that were hit hard by previous years' droughts.

Grass in January

The home farm has two unnamed creeks running on each side of the farm, while the Broad River is a boundary on a separate farm.

Sam has worked with Rutherford County Cooperative Extension, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Rutherford Soil and Water Conservation District, Farm Service Agency, and the Rutherford County Cattlemen's Association to put into practice a long list of environmentally friendly and conservation minded practices.

II.

Environmental Stewardship Practices

When Sam became a part of the farm, cows were having a negative impact on the streams and there were severe drainage issues in the form of gullies and washes over many parts of the farm. To address these issues over a period of several years, Sam began working with NRCS and Rutherford Soil and Water to apply for cost share funding through their programs. As a result, he has implemented a long list of conservation practices on his farm.

To correct erosion and drainage issues, there were areas that needed to be repaired, smoothed and seeded. These areas were graded in a manner that created water diversions with lined waterways and pipe drops and seeded with permanent grasses.

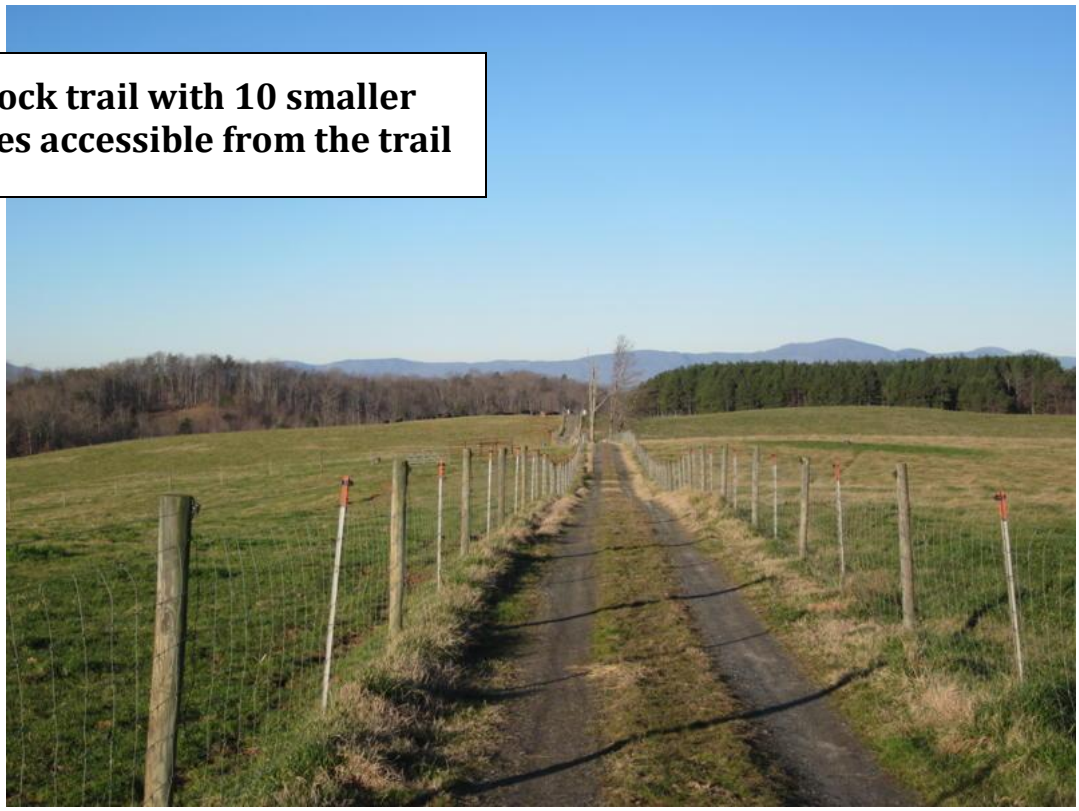
Drainage and Erosion Problems

Sam and District Conservationist, Albert Moore with grassed and lined waterways with pipe drops

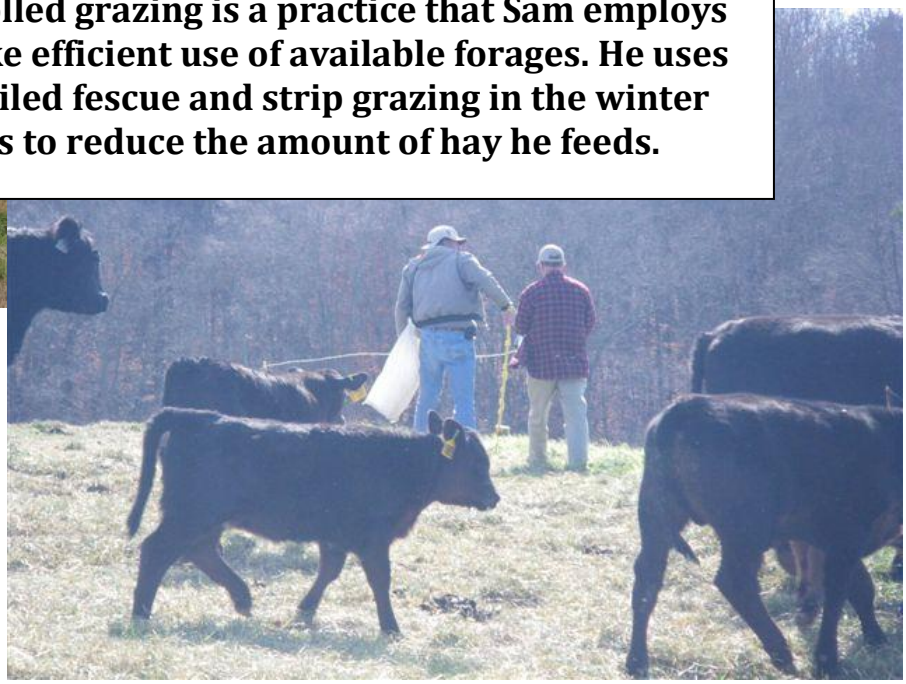
Grazing was also an issue. Cows had previously been allowed to freely graze large sections of pasture, which reduced their efficiency and created spots of overgrazing. This had a negative impact on forage stand and ultimately resulted in new areas of erosion. Sam installed a stock trail down the center of the farm and created smaller paddocks of 10-12 acres off both sides of the trail. This allowed him to immediately implement a rotational grazing system and had a huge positive impact on grazing efficiency and forage stand. Sam regularly takes soil samples and manages his fertilizer applications by recommendations. This saves him money and also prevents him from applying nutrients that he doesn't need.

One large, overgrazed, under-managed pasture

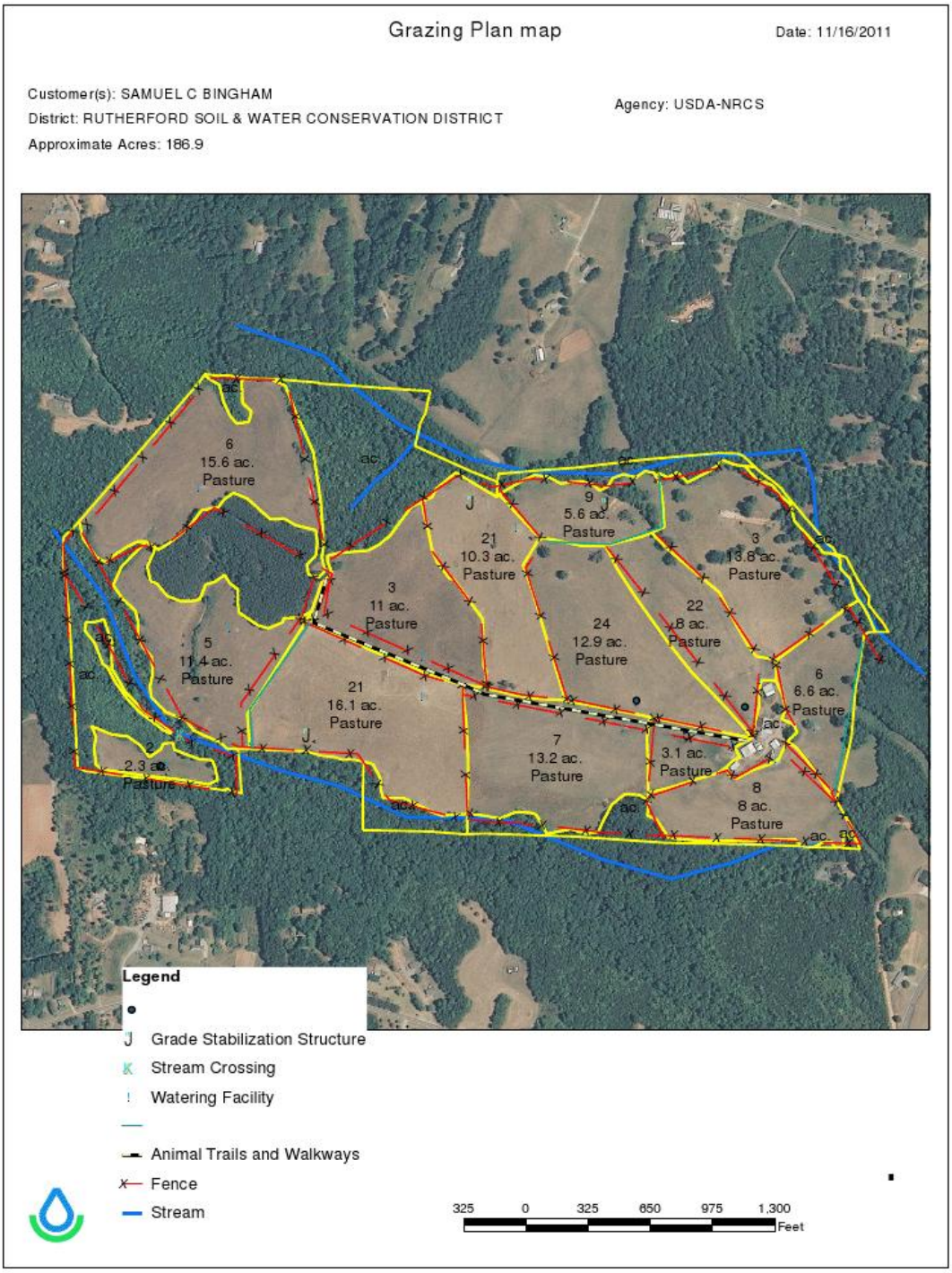
New stock trail with 10 smaller pastures accessible from the trail



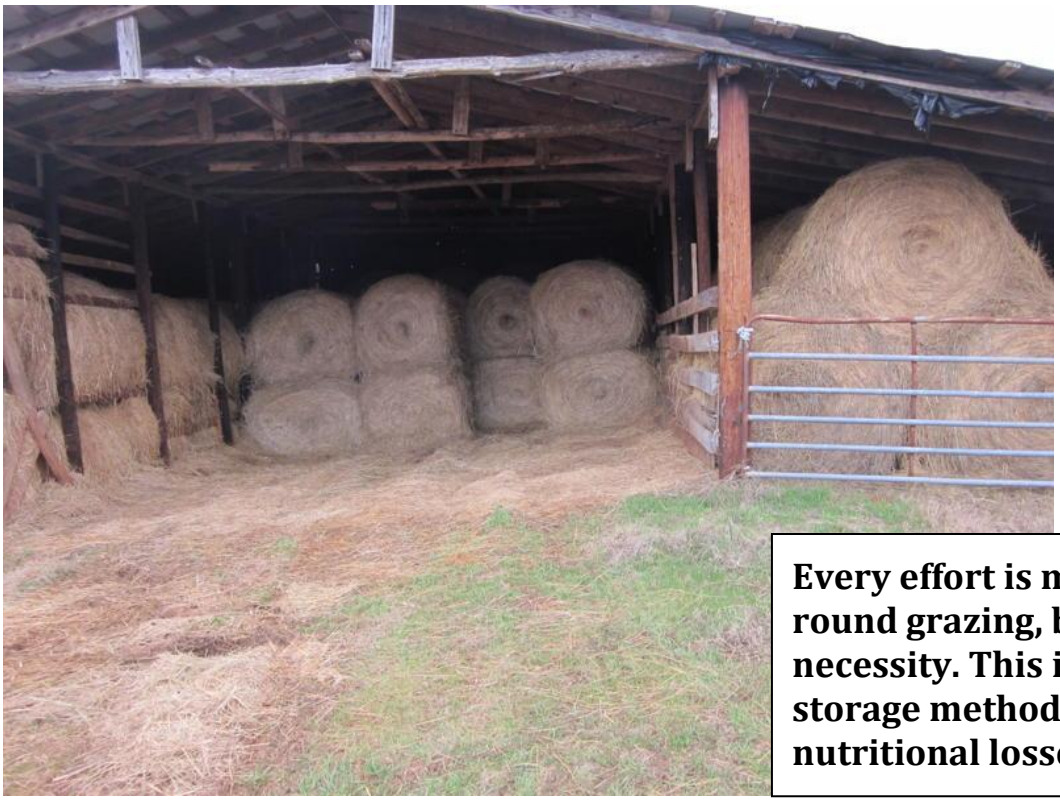
Controlled grazing is a practice that Sam employs to make efficient use of available forages. He uses stockpiled fescue and strip grazing in the winter months to reduce the amount of hay he feeds.



Sam uses these portable mineral feeders to aid him in his rotational grazing and strip grazing system.



Map of grazing plan for the home farm with all available pastures, fencing, watering stations, stream exclusion fences, stream crossings, and stock trail.

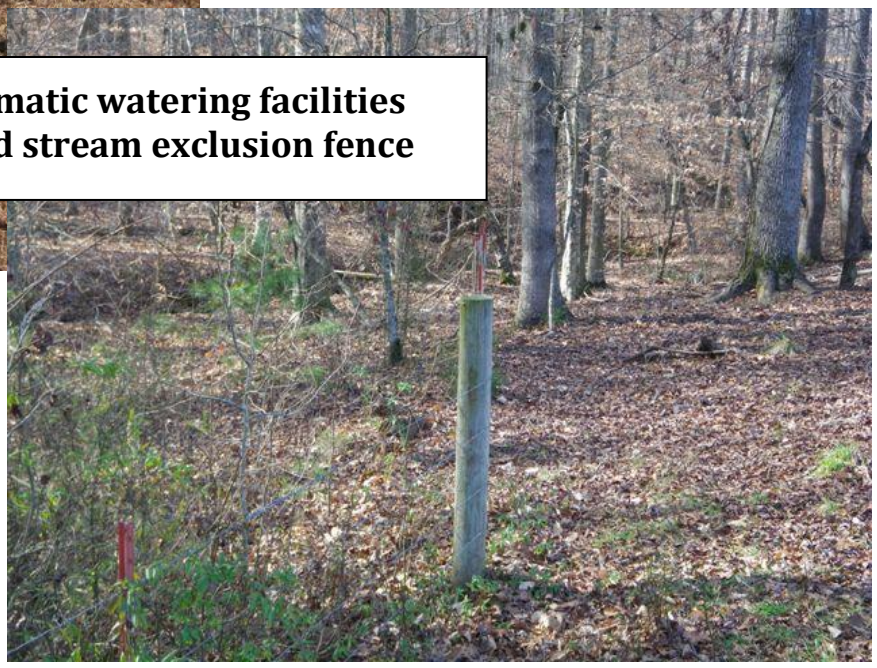


Every effort is made to support year round grazing, but hay is sometimes a necessity. This is an example of proper storage methods utilized to prevent nutritional losses.

When feeding hay, a sacrifice area is used. This site also has a concrete pad to allow for manure collection for pasture application.

This farm is surrounded by streams. Over the years, these streams were the water source for cattle. These streams were fenced out and watering stations installed that allowed cattle access to water from all pastures. At locations where cattle had to cross streams to access other pastures, stream crossings were installed to reduce impact on the stream banks at these locations. This stream exclusion project also created wooded buffers that serve as a filter strip for water reaching the streams as well as improved wildlife habitat.

Watering system prior to improvements



1 of 18 automatic watering facilities installed and stream exclusion fence

As a result of fencing out streams and managing wooded areas, this farm has become a haven for wildlife. White-tailed deer and wild turkey flourish in the areas that are protected from livestock activity.

III.

Educational Efforts

By implementing and managing these practices made possible through the NC Agriculture Cost Share Program, Environmental Quality Incentives Program, and the Clean Water Management Trust Fund, Sam has a cattle operation that is easier to manage and is a place for other producers to learn practices that they could easily implement on their farms. Sam is on the board of directors of the Rutherford County Cattlemen's Association and has hosted educational tours on his farm. He is currently working with Cooperative Extension and NRCS on a stockpiled fescue/strip grazing demonstration and plans to have a pasture walk for producers in late January.

As another step to practice long term stewardship, Sam has established a 30 year protection easement with the Rutherford Conservation District on his buffer strips. This should have a long-term positive impact on water quality on and around his farm. Another non-farm related environmental practice is the establishment of a solar panel at this home to use in heating his hot water. He has also established a solar panel collection system in one of his pastures and sells power back to Duke power.

He has entered the farm into the USDA Conservation Stewardship Program and installed enhancements through the program to benefit wildlife and water quality.

As a result of his environmental efforts, his farm received the Outstanding Conservation Farm Family of the year for Rutherford county in 2009.