

## 2016 NC ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP AWARD PROGRAM

Charles Johnson

Charles A. Johnson

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Charles Johnson currently operates a cow/calf operation mostly compiled of Angus cattle. Growing up on a small farm in Hiddenite, NC the family farm then consisted of a few Hereford Cattle. After High School, Charles began working for Southern Bell while row cropping and raising cattle part time. In the early 80's he left row cropping behind to focus mainly on cattle production. The Hereford cattle transitioned to Polled Hereford and then on to Angus cattle. Now retired from public work for over 12 years, he maintains purebred and commercial herds consisting of both Angus and Polled Hereford. Over the years he has emphasized buying quality bulls from individuals and test stations to improve his herd genetics. In the last few years he has used AI to gain access to superior genetics. By improving his breeding program he now markets around 14 herd bulls a year to area producers.

Through the years, Charles has acquired more land and expanded the cow herd. He currently runs approximately 120 cows and maintains 300 acres of farm land. Charles completed some of his first environmental conservation projects in the late 90's by installing heavy use areas for the cattle to feed. By installing matting and gravel he was able to feed his cattle in the winter and reduce the amount of area damaged by the cattle congregating to feed. He has since went on to install two wells, 4,698 feet of water line, 1015 feet of stock trail, 12,724 feet of exclusion fencing, 8 water tanks, and installed cross fencing for prescribed grazing through EQIP. Charles felt it was important to fence out the creeks in order to preserve the trees and soil along the stream banks. He realized with cattle accessing the streams, no new trees would be allowed to grow and therefore nothing to replace the older trees. Trees provide shade in the summer for the

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cattle and are important to the aesthetics of the land. He is currently working on another project to further divide his pastures and install waterers to allow for a more intense grazing plan on one of his farms.

Charles is an innovative producer who is willing to approach things from a different angle. Whether it is better grass seed varieties or an improved way to feed cattle in the winter time, he is constantly analyzing his operation to adapt to changing technology and production practices. He now uses a GPS monitoring device in his tractor when spraying fields or applying fertilizer. This assists him with accurate application, thereby saving him money and protecting the environment from over application that could lead to excess runoff near creeks. Charles cares about the environment but he (or his wife) also cares about the bottom line!

Improving cattle nutrition is also important to Charles. Hay fields consist of Matua and Orchard Grasses and he also has several Max Q Fescue fields that he changed over from Kentucky 31 fescue several years ago. He feels that these varieties provide the needed nutrition to his cows and calves in times when hay feeding is necessary. He has also concentrated on improved forages for his cattle and wildlife. Seven years ago he converted a fescue field to Bluestem. The addition of bluestem has improved wildlife populations such as quail but it has also provided him with a warm season grass to harvest for hay. He partnered with the NC Wildlife Resource Commission to plant the bluestem to encourage wildlife habitat. He was so impressed by that field that he converted another field on his own shortly thereafter. In an effort to get more out of his warm season fields, wheat was no-tilled in the bluestem that will be harvested and wrapped early in the 2016 season. He is hoping to maximize his forage production while maintaining high quality and was willing to try this to see if it would be successful.

In 2010-2011 Charles partnered with Cooperative Extension and Alexander Soil and Water to demonstrate intensive grazing on stockpiled fescue. Although reluctant at first, moving fence is not as fun as driving a tractor, he now sees the benefits and actual time saved. Since then he has stockpiled fescue and intensively grazed fescue at each cattle location. He has seen the benefits and

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readily shares his experiences with others. Charles hosted a demonstration at his farm highlighting this project and willingly allows us to bring other producers in to view his grazing operation. In order to further enhance his grazing efforts he purchased a no-till drill in order to plant triticale and wheat to enhance winter/spring grazing and to refurbish pastures and hay fields. Summer annuals eventually piqued his interest and planted 5 acres of sorghum sudan grass which he followed up with Marshall Ryegrass in the fall. He strip grazed the sorghum sudan in order to maximize forage intake and reduce damage to the plants. He then followed suit with the Marshall Ryegrass in late winter early spring. Charles has also experimented with cool season mixtures that included radishes, rye, triticale, clover, and wheat followed by a summer annual mix. He utilizes this high form of nutrition to feed his stockers. Since completing his first stockpiled fescue project, Johnson Farms has put a higher emphasis on grazing and making sure what forage is harvested is high quality.

Charles is active in both the Alexander and Iredell County Cattlemen's Association and is a member of the NC Cattlemen's Association. He was awarded the River Friendly Farmer Award by Alexander County Soil and Water in 2006 and has enrolled his farm land into the Agriculture Districting Program under Alexander County Farmland Preservation. He has worked cooperatively in the past with Extension to host Cattlemen's Meetings, county wide youth educational events, assisted youth in exhibiting beef heifers, and helped with livestock judging for 4-H and FFA. Charles truly is a progressive agriculturalist and strives to remain environmentally friendly to sustain farming for future generations. Portions of his farmland have been in his family for multiple generations, dating back prior to the 1900's. Charles and his wife Jane have been married for 43 years and have two daughters, and three grandchildren.

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As you can see Charles is a progressive cattle producer, willing to try new things and conduct experiments on his own, in an effort to improve his cattle operation. He also shares his grazing experiences with other cattle producers. Some of his best educational sharing is done at the local country store! Does everything work perfectly every time? No, but he keeps trying and working on because that is what a cattle producer/farmer does!

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*Cattle turned  
into graze at  
the beginning  
of the project in  
mid-December  
2010*



*Adjacent pasture  
where hay was  
the feed source  
during our  
2010/2011  
Grazing Trial.*



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*Lee Holcomb,  
Alexander Soil and  
Water then NRCS  
now, performing the  
drop height test to  
determine amount of  
forage available to  
graze .*



*2011 Demonstration  
Field Day at the  
demonstration site  
where other  
producers were able  
to see how intensive  
grazing is done.*

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*Example of one shed where hay is stored to reduce loss and protect quality. Most hay feeding is done in late October, November and early December prior to strip grazing and for calves at weaning.*



*Sorghum Sudan Grass planted to extend summer grazing. Poly wire was used to strip graze the 5 acre field to maximize intake and protect the plants.*



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*Cows  
grazing on  
stockpiled  
fescue this  
year.*



*Another  
example of a  
heavy use area.  
This is where he  
feeds out his  
yearling bulls to  
sell each year.*



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*Stock trail installed to reduce erosion.*



*Pond with natural area behind for wildlife. This area is excluded from pasture and on the edge of a hay field.*



*This area is where calves are weaned and backgrounded prior to selling. This is one of the examples of the heavy use areas installed. Charles later went back and concreted the area to aid in clean up.*

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