

Grassbank system to benefit cattle producers and conservationists



The Loess Hills Alliance, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, and Agren have received funding from the Iowa Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Conservation Innovation Grant program to develop and demonstrate a grassbank system in Iowa's Loess Hills. Grassbanks offer a unique way to restore grasslands threatened by invasive woody vegetation while stimulating grass-based livestock production. "Grassbanks are used in Wyoming, Montana, Arizona and New Mexico," said Tom Buman of Agren. "To our knowledge, however, there's never been a grassbank proposed for east of the Missouri River." Grassbanks allow livestock producers to restore natural plant communities and increase forage production on their own land, even as they continue to raise livestock in a grass-based production system. "A grassbank can be a farm or ranch that's set up to receive stock from private landowners while these landowners rejuvenate their grasslands," Buman said. This project will establish a grassbank system on 750 acres of public and private land in the Loess Hills. "This is a win-win situation that can help return cow-calf herds to the Loess Hills while promoting conservation," Buman said.

Kathy Koskovich, IDNR Private Lands Biologist, is interested in using some of DNR's public lands for grassbanks. "Some of the grasslands owned by IDNR are in need of diversified management," Koskovich said. "It would be great to get some grazing animals back onto IDNR land. We know proper grazing can be used as a management tool for grasslands, benefiting certain species of wildlife, while allowing farmers to gain some benefits too."