

# Feature Story

United States Department of Agriculture • Natural Resources Conservation Service • 100 W. Capitol St.  
Ste 1321, Jackson, MS 39269 • Phone: (601) 965-5205 • Web: [www.ms.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.ms.nrcs.usda.gov)

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## NRCS Helps Carroll County Man Tame Wild Soil

By Justin Fritscher  
NRCS Mississippi  
[justin.fritscher@ms.usda.gov](mailto:justin.fritscher@ms.usda.gov)

*Vaden, Miss.* — The soil on James W. Nelms' Carroll County farm is highly erodible. But with a little help from USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), he was able to tame the rebellious landscape.

"I wouldn't farm this land if I couldn't stop the erosion," the cattle farmer said. "I make sure I use conservation practices throughout my property."

NRCS programs, like the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI), have helped fund ponds, filter strips and other best management practices (BMPs).

One of the provisions of The Food and Security Act of 1985 was to prohibited farmer from participating in USDA programs if they produced agricultural commodities on highly erodible lands without proper conservation treatment.

Filter strips are strips of land that are planted to permanent vegetation and left undisturbed. These strips slow water runoff and are placed strategically to minimize erosion. They also trap and remove sediment and other pollutants from runoff water.

Nelms uses these grassed strips to slow down erosion on his fields. He successfully tills fields annually and plants annual ryegrass to feed beef calves to heavier weights after weaning and to supplement his mature cow herd during winter months when his perennial forages are dormant. "Maintaining this soil shows the land cooperates when you treat it right," Nelms said.

"See all this – this is NRCS at work," Nelms said while enjoying a hilltop vista of his farm filled with lush grazing fields. Nelms is proud of his rye grass, which stands up as tall as his knees. "This was made possible through the technical assistance that I received from the NRCS", he explained.

"Ryegrass production grows healthy cows," he said. "Mature cattle need to be on a high nutritional status to breed back." Weaned calves also need the nutrition to grow – and get ready to sell, he said.

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Nelms purchased his first piece of farmland in the 1950s and has added fields over the years. Now he has more than 100 cows. Unlike many other cattle producers, he grazes weaned calves until they are ready for feedlots.

He has lived a life filled with agriculture, working for the Mississippi State University Extension Service. He worked with the 4H Club youngsters for years and has mentored teens who became successful farmers and leaders in the agricultural community.

“That’s a success story if I’ve ever heard one,” he said. “We help these students to become leaders and help society.”

Now retired, Nelms still teaches. “Other farmers consult with him on best management alternatives, they even come here and learn conservation practices,” said Walter Jackson, State Grazing Lands Specialist/Agronomist with the NRCS. Nelms’ farm has received national notoriety, even a visit from the former NRCS Chief, Bruce Knight, who endorsed his use of filter strips.

“There are over 50 grazing lands efficiency demonstration sites across the state,” Acting State Conservationist Al Garner said. “Farmers like Nelms have cost shared on these sites with NRCS and allowed the agency to host field days, tours and pasture walks to educate others on best management practices that may benefit their individual operations.”

The Grazing Land Conservation Initiative (GLCI) is a nationwide collaborative process of individuals and organizations working to maintain and improve the management, productivity and health of the nation’s privately owned grazing land.

This process has formed coalitions that represent the grass root concerns that impact private grazing land. The coalitions actively seek sources to increase technical assistance and public awareness activities that maintain or enhance grazing land resources.

For more information on GLCI, visit your [local USDA service center](#) or the [Mississippi GLCI site](#).

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*(Top) James Nelms is proud of his Carroll County cattle farm – as well as the lush clover he grows to feed them. This long-time farmer uses best management practices like filter strips to prevent soil erosion.*

*(Bottom Left) Grazing Lands Specialist Walter Jackson and rancher James Nelms measure the amount of clover on one of Nelms' pastures in Carroll County.*

*(Bottom Right) Cattle feed on clover on James Nelms' Carroll County ranch.*

*Photos by Justin Fritscher, NRCS Mississippi*

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