

Phil Bohl

April 13, 2010



Picture outline:

Phil Bohl and his friend, a Pug dog, are seen near a water tank where his stocker cattle are grazing out wheat. Bohl says the dog, who wears a bright orange jacket to keep people driving farm equipment aware of his presence, goes everywhere with him. Bohl farms near Chattanooga, Ok. in eastern Tillman County. (NTOK Cotton photo)

Chattanooga, Ok.-Tillman County farmer Phil Bohl lost his 2009 wheat crop to drought. In the fall of 2009, it started raining and never quit for several weeks. Suddenly, Bohl had plenty of wheat, volunteer growth that had been planted and fertilized the year before, but never emerged from the ground. Bohl is typical of Southern Plains farmers whose families have learned to make the proper adjustments to make a living on a dryland farm. "We started buying stocker cattle, light calves, to turn out on the volunteer wheat," he said. "The wheat grew so fast, it was difficult to put enough cattle out to eat it down. When it got too wet and the cattle were bogging down in the fields, we moved them around to other fields. "Also, the cattle market had bottomed out and cattle prices started increasing. If our cattle hadn't gained a pound, we would have made money on them because prices rose so fast." Bohl and his son, Adam, who farms with him, are grazing out their volunteer wheat. They still have cattle grazing the fields. Happy as he is about the past winter grazing stocker cattle on wheat, Bohl is also optimistic about spring planting season. "We will follow the grazed-out wheat with cotton," he said. "We had approximately 1,000 acres of wheat and we will have at least that much or more cotton when we complete our planting next month."

With good farming conditions, farmers also must overcome some difficulties, Bohl said.

"Cattle grazing muddy fields leave a very rough surface when the ground dries out," he said. "In order to prepare a good seed bed for the cotton, we have a lot of work ahead of us. We will need to plow all the fields and smooth out the surface for a seedbed."

In past years, Bohl has found rotating wheat and cotton to be a winning combination for his farming operation.

"We have a lot of weed problems growing continuous wheat," Bohl said. "Rotating cotton, a completely different crop grown at a different time with a big tap root, breaks up the perennial weed problem we have with wheat. At the same time, cotton breaks up plow pans with the root system extending down below the pan."

"And to make matters better, the world supply of cotton has been reduced significantly, so there should be more demand for cotton products in the future. The price for cotton is improving."

Bohl is hopeful the winter of 2009-10 with excellent cattle grazing conditions and improved prices will be followed by a good growing season for his dryland cotton.

"We plant Roundup Ready Flex varieties with BollGard to help us combat weeds and insect problems," he said. "We know if we have a good planting season with enough moisture, we have a good start for top yielding cotton."

"The new stacked-gene cotton varieties have proven they yield well and have some tolerance to dry weather." Bohl's father, J.W., now retired, farmed the same fields his son and grandson farm now.

"Our family has a good farming tradition," he said. "My son attended college for awhile, but decided to come back to farm with me. We have stayed close to the home farm. "I have lived in Chattanooga all of my life. I have moved five times, but never more than a mile and a half any time." Bohl gives his time generously working on state and national farm policy committees. He serves as a director of the Oklahoma Cotton Council, the Oklahoma Boll Weevil Eradication Organization and the Producers Cooperative Oil Mill in Oklahoma City, Ok.