

Center for Grassland Studies Alumni Update

Kristin (Nollette) Schlueter, Resource Conservationist Natural Resources Conservation Service

Kristin (Nollette) Schlueter is a resource conservationist with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in West Point, Nebraska. The duties and subject matter of her position are very diverse, which keep things interesting and challenging. The NRCS offers a wide variety of financial and technical assistance to help producers voluntarily apply conservation to their land. Working with producers who manage cropland, pastureland, animal feeding operations and wildlife habitat are all part of NRCS activities. Kristin says, "I really feel like protecting our nation's natural resources is one of the most noble callings a profession can have, and ultimately that is what keeps me engaged."



The soil health movement was just beginning to gain steam when Schlueter joined the NRCS. Determining how to make current cropping systems mimic Mother Nature and act more like a native range system is what it equates to for Schlueter. Improving plant diversity with cover crops and adding livestock back to the landscape to see how the soil, the plants, and the livestock are interconnected, and understanding a system and the snowball effects that can occur when pieces of that system are missing, i.e. soil health affects nutrient management, pest management, soil erosion, water quality, profit potential, etc., is all very relevant to her job today. "This interconnectedness is what attracted me to a degree in Grazing Livestock Systems (GLS)," explains Schlueter.

Kristin's family background and growing up on a small family ranch amid the beauty of the Sandhills also galvanized her interest in pursuing a GLS degree. Participating in 4-H and FFA activities were part of Schlueter's learning. However, it was her father and uncle, both ag teachers, who were always educating her, whether it was while working cattle, haying or artificially inseminating cattle during the summers. She remembers being quizzed on plant identification while on horseback moving cows.

Schlueter went on to attend the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) and obtained Bachelor's of Science degrees in Animal Science and Grazing Livestock Systems, and a Master's in Agronomy. She feels her advisors did a great job making sure she had the necessary classes to prepare her for a career with the NRCS. One of the most valuable things she learned from her GLS studies that supports her current career activities is a systems approach to thinking. "There are some days when I think I ended up about as far removed from range as I can be, but, ironically, those same concepts of range management are serving me well today, even in a landscape dominated with corn and soybean production," says Schlueter.

In addition to regular studies, Schlueter participated in the GLS internship program. She gained information as a range trainee at the NRCS office in North Platte, Nebraska, which led to future (continued on back)



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summer jobs and employment opportunities during school. The internship with the NRCS was invaluable in gaining experience and making important networking connections, both of which Kristin attributes to helping her land her current position at the NRCS.

Kristin and her husband, Cory, also a UNL graduate, live near Scribner, Nebraska with their children, Grace (13), Aubree (11), Hannah (9), and Emmett (4). They have their own cow/calf operation selling Gelbvieh and Balancer, primarily Gelbvieh X Red Angus cross, seed stock. Developing bred heifers is also part of their operation.