

Beel Family: Recipient of 2013 Leopold Conservation Award



Photo credit: Jennifer Beel

In 1937, Henry O. Beel purchased land located on the Brown and Cherry County line in the Sandhills of Nebraska. His son, Henry C. Beel, joined him 23 years later, and a legacy was born. In 1990, the third generation of Beels assumed stewardship of the nearly 22,000-acre cattle operation. Celebrating 75 years on the ranch, the Beel Family takes pride in looking back on the progress they have made, and looks forward to what lies ahead for future generations.

Owned and operated by brothers Frank, Henry and Adam, along with their wives Jennifer, Mary and Jenny, the Beel Ranch was handed down by their father and grandfather who instilled in them the importance of treating the land with care. Today, they make it a priority to teach their own children the importance of maintaining and caring for our natural environment.

Ranch records indicate that in 1945, Henry O. Beel entered into the first of many conservation plans for the ranch. It developed a soil and water plan allowing for rotational grazing, weed mowing, seeding of wheat and well placement.

Almost seven decades later, conservation and range management continues to play a crucial role in the management of the Beel Ranch. Participating in cost sharing programs through the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP), the brothers spent numerous hours planning, designing and coordinating the installation of 32 miles of pipeline including: 89 hydrants, 6 wells and 45 new tanks across the ranch. With the existing 67 windmills and tanks there is adequate supply of water in every pasture on the ranch allowing the brothers to successfully match their integrated rotational grazing plan to the environment and climate. Over the years these improvements have allowed the land to be better utilized through their efficient rotational grazing system while increasing habitat for upland bird species, raptors and large game.

In 2004, a 10-year agreement was signed with the Nebraska Game & Parks Commission, Sandhills Task Force and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Services to participate in a wildlife management program. Wildlife sanctuaries, created voluntarily, now offer exceptional viewing of birds and other wildlife on the ranch. Grouse, pheasants, bald eagles, prairie chickens, falcons and hawks are numerous year-round. The Beels also take advantage of opportunities to host and educate people who otherwise may not be exposed to life on the ranch.

“The Beel family has always been and always will be excellent stewards of the natural resources that they are entrusted with,” wrote Dennis Bauer of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Cooperative Extension in a letter of support. “You get that sense any time you converse with them about rations, mineral nutrition, weed control or wildlife concerns. You can feel the sense of pride and dedication they have in caring for the land and animals.”

Editor's Note: Above content is from the 2013 Nebraska Leopold Conservation Award brochure. The Sand County Foundation, which administers the LCA in several states, solicits nominations for the award. People can nominate themselves or others. The criteria, nomination process and deadlines can be found at <http://leopoldconservationaward.org/>. As you can see from the below summary of the nomination process, it is relatively simple. The deadline for nominations for the Nebraska award is March 1 of each year. The award is announced in late April.

Criteria

Landowners are key producers of conservation. Private citizens who have responsibility for land possess the capacity, the aptitude, and the desire to improve natural habitats. We believe that giving the people closest to the land improved tools to heal and better manage working ecosystems will result in the most durable conservation results. The Leopold Conservation Award Review Panel will be evaluating properties based on responsible and sustainable land management, economics, innovation, overall land health, and community outreach and leadership.

Applications

Please answer each of the following questions, based on the criteria of the award. Each answer must be limited to 1,000 words.

1. **Responsible Management:** Describe the applicant's approach to land and resource management and how it may have changed over the years.
2. **Sustainable Revenues:** Describe how the applicant is generating additional revenue or lowering production costs in ways that help achieve long-term sustainability and conservation outcomes.
3. **Leadership:** Describe any significant achievements the applicant has made within the agricultural community in Nebraska.
4. **Overall Land Health:** Describe specific conservation efforts that contributed to improved land health.
5. **Innovation:** Describe any innovative techniques that the applicant has used to improve natural resources on their land.
6. **Outreach:** Describe any efforts where the applicant has shared their management techniques with others inside and outside of agriculture (examples: research, educational and media tours, et cetera).
7. Describe any other factors the review panel should take into consideration.
8. Provide at least three letters of recommendation.

With your application, we encourage you to include supporting materials such as news articles, photos, maps, or any resources that would assist the panel in reviewing your application.