

Conservation SHOWCASE



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NRCS

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A Legacy of Conservation: Lessons Learned

A legacy of conservation lessons learned by parents who farmed during the Great Depression left an impression on Bene Medelez. A rancher in his own right, Bene has been working with USDA- Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to keep and improve the good conservation aspects of his 5,100-acre ranch acquired in 2007. While this is his first time working with NRCS, his parents worked with the agency in Texas early in its development.

Broken Spur Ranch is situated along the east fork of Birch Creek basin south of Pilot Rock and produces cattle, alfalfa, triticale, hay, peas and sweet corn. Other than 100 acres of irrigated land, the ranch is pastureland and home for 100 brood cows that were hand-picked by Bene from a bloodline in Montana.

According to Loren Unruh, District Conservationist for NRCS, “Bene assumed a Conservation Security Program (CSP) contract from Tom Rudd when he purchased the ranch. Bene is continuing the CSP program’s schedule of spot spraying, pest management, crop rotation and low tillage to maintain good soil and water health. He is improving irrigation system efficiency, supplementing what is in place with irrigation innovations.”

In response to a history of fierce flooding and the need for increased irrigation efficiency in the Birch Creek basin, NRCS has developed a plan



Aluminum piping will be replaced with a sturdier steel pipe for increased stability.

to stabilize the streambanks with a cross-over project. The completed project will reduce the risk of losing valuable irrigation equipment during flooding and increase the system efficiency. Farm Manager Harry Larson says, “In some years with high water, including this one, we have to take out the pump and hook ups. If you miss, it goes down the creek.” Loren adds, “NRCS is designing a high and stable enough structure so the water doesn’t wash the streambank out every year.”

Bene adds, “We have had the aluminum pipe across the stream twice bend on us. We were holding it with stakes. Working with NRCS and Loren we will have a steel pipe with a structure to hold it up and won’t have to mess with the creek at all. They (NRCS) are coming along and helping us with this.”

“We want to keep the ranch in great shape,” says Bene. “I’m doing everything in my power to produce the good grasses for the cattle.” In addition to his work with NRCS, he is working with Soil and Water Conservation District to develop springs at intermittent intervals around the ranch, “so we can keep the cattle out of the creeks.” Watering stations located every half mile around the pastureland is ideal. The development of water for wildlife habitat is also high on Bene’s list. “The water is important for the elk and turkey on this ranch,” he notes. “The government helps us to keep the habitat in place and we are doing everything in our power to keep on top of it.”

“NRCS has been so great to work with – they are on top of things and they take care of us,” Bene remarks. “They are good at communications and

they let us know when something is coming up. When I hear from them, I go in and do whatever we need to do to get it done right. Everybody in NRCS has been helpful to me – not knowing a lot about this and learning.”

Bene’s advice to other landowners is to check out the NRCS programs and start talking with the staff about the kinds of help available. He also suggests visiting some of the projects to see what has been done.

According to Loren, various agencies are partnering to help Bene ratchet up his conservation practices, “We all work together to meet the common goals.”

Bene and his family including his wife, brother and seven children own and operate a large trucking firm based out of Hermiston. “We haul agricultural products— what’s eaten on the

“ “ We all work together to meet the common goals. ” ”
 —Bene Medelez

American table,” he explains. With 100 trucks, 200 seasonal and 90 year round employees, Bene looks to the ranch for a change of pace. “It’s stressful in our business. I like to come to the ranch, see the cattle and relax. Every chance I get my pickup starts coming toward Pilot Rock.”

Water levels regularly fluctuate in Birch Creek

