**NRCS**
Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

South Dakota's
**Conservation Districts**

**SRM**
Society for Range Management

# CONSERVATION *Showcase*

## Smeenk Family Honored for Stewardship



Jeff and Kim Smeenk and the Center of the Nation Cattle Company have a legacy of stewardship. For a hundred years, the Smeenk family has kept the natural resources on their property healthy and productive. The State of South Dakota recognizes the Smeenks as a "Century Farm."

NRCS, the SD Cattlemen's Association, and others submitted the Smeenks as South Dakota's nomination for the 2010 National Cattlemen's Beef Association Environmental Stewardship Award.

As a local leader in environmental stewardship, Jeff serves on the Butte Conservation District. He interacts with many partners in conservation on a county and state level including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, South Dakota Game Fish and Parks (SDGFP), and the South Dakota Association of Conservation Districts.

He is actively involved in several state and local organizations such as the SD Cattlemen's Association (SDCA), Farm Bureau Association, South Dakota Public Lands Council, Belle Fourche Masonic Lodge, and South Dakota Agriculture and Rural Leadership.

Through the years, they have taken steps to protect their resources while maintaining a sustainable business operation. Jeff and Kim fully realize that the health of the soil and grass resources should be the main priority. As grassland managers, they believe that the Center of the Nation Cattle Company should operate with the philosophy of "I raise grass."



Antelope typically go through or under wire fences rather than jumping over them so Jeff installed antelope crossings in cross fences which consist of a smooth bottom wire 16 inches off of the ground.

**CONSERVATION...Our Purpose. Our Passion.**

In 1999, NRCS helped Jeff create a new rest rotation-grazing plan for the ranch's operation. The new plan specifically addressed the rangeland while simultaneously adjusting the number of animal units to be grazed. This conservation plan balances forage to ensure there is adequate forage on the ranch to meet existing livestock forage requirements in amounts as well as quality.

The Center of the Nation Cattle Company summers cattle on 7,288 acres of range land that was part of Jeff's grandfather's ranch. This native prairie consists of western wheatgrass and green needlesgrass. Jeff estimates he can summer 250 pairs on the summer range during good years, however, due to drought and their management plan allowing the grasses to recover, they've only been grazing 150 to 200 pairs.

Jeff's recently gained knowledge of native bird populations and how indicator species can be used for monitoring and managing rangelands has helped determine his management decisions as they annually review their operations. Since the ranch is in the historic native home range for sage grouse, Jeff is actively adjusting how he does daily work so his actions have the least impact on the habitat and life cycle of the birds. Jeff's management also benefits mammals including antelope and deer. He believes everyone should have access and be able to enjoy natural resources and has enrolled his rangeland in the SD GFP Walk-In hunting program.

In 2005, Jeff saw an opportunity to enhance sage grouse habitat on their ranch through Sage Grouse Habitat Development Special Initiative under the EQIP.

Through this initiative, the Jeff received technical and financial assistance for conservation practices that resulted in enhanced plant community vigor, supression of noxious weeds, and sustaining of a diverse native plant community for forb components that benefit sage grouse.

Genuine efforts, such as these, led to recognition by the South Dakota Section of the Society for Range Management as a 2008 Excellence in Range Management Award winner. In 2007, Jeff was nominated by SDCA as their candidate for the National Cattlemen's Beef Association's Young Cattlemen's Conference.

Jeff and Kim openly embrace new conservation science and technologies that fit with the goals and objectives of their family business.