

2009 BANKER AWARD WINNERS

Ben & Rachael Barr

Gene & Nita Barr

By Laura Marks, County Extension Director / CEA Agriculture

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Gene Barr was born at Diamond Springs, on the homestead the Barr family had acquired back in 1880. He grew up farming and taking care of the livestock. He has continued to live and work on the ranch at Diamond Springs ever since, except for a brief stint in the military. He married the neighbor's daughter, Juanita Hamilton, in 1953. They raised two daughters, Kathy and Mary; and a son, Ben, who resides on the ranch.

Ben began buying cows while still in High School and began farming rented ground in 1982. Eventually, he began renting ground from his dad; and today manages the daily affairs of the ranch. Ben met Rachael when she was visiting with friends in the area, and they married in 1995. They have a son, Samuel, who is six years old.

The ranch today continues to grow hay and grain crops as it has since the beginning; with about 10 percent of the operation in crop ground. They currently grow mostly beans, alfalfa and brome. Mostly the ground is conventionally tilled, with terraces put in place years ago to help prevent erosion. Grass strips have been planted under the timber along the creek banks, which aids in filtering any run-off from the fields.

Still, the life's blood of the ranch is the Flint Hills grass. 1100 acres of native grass is maintained; currently home to 140 Angus-cross cow-calf pairs and 20 replacement heifers. The quality of the grass in the Barr pastures indicates the level of management that Gene and Ben do on a regular basis. Careful attention to grass management, such as burning to manage weeds, care not to overgraze their grass resources and an ongoing war against trees in the grasslands has resulted in some of the most beautiful pastures in Morris County.

The Barr Family has two federal dams on the ranch; the first having been built in 1934 with WPA dollars under the Roosevelt presidency's efforts to put people back to work. This first pond was built with one caterpillar truck, teams of horses, and many of the neighbors. In 1985 a second watershed pond was built to control flooding in the area. Just this year a tank was added below a small stock water pond with cost-share assistance from the Morris County Conservation District and technical assistance from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Fencing the cattle out the pond itself will help reduce sedimentation build up in the pond, extending its useful life. Ben says the side benefit is a gravity flow design that prevents his having to chop ice for the cattle in cold weather.

As Gene was a member of the Diamond Creek Watershed board in years past; Ben is the current president; and was an integral part of obtaining the funding for the latest watershed dam, built this year just a few miles south of the ranch.

The Barr family enjoys the wildlife on the ranch, and Ben maintains wildlife habitat on the ponds as part of their original agreement with the Conservation Service when the ponds were built.

Ben says what Gene and Nita built over the years has made it easy for him and Rachael to take over the daily operation of the ranch. Gene continues to make the rounds with Ben each day. Ben credits the Lord with blessing them and allowing them to maintain their stewardship of the land and the ranch. Hard work and a love of the land has surely been a part of their success, as well.

Please join me in congratulating Gene, Nita, Ben and Rachael on winning the 2009 Bankers Award.

AWARD WINNERS



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