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# True land steward

By JERILYN JOHNSON

**B**OB Eckenfels cherishes his close connection to the land. It's part of this fifth-generation farmer's heritage. His ancestors settled on land in the picturesque hills and river valleys near Sainte Genevieve in 1851. In addition to the farm, Bob inherited a commitment to protecting the area's natural resources.

"My intention is to always be a good steward of the land," Bob says. "Controlling soil erosion and protecting water quality are top priorities here, as we are located at the head of a watershed — several stream tributaries of the Mississippi River start here."

For these efforts and more, Eckenfels Farm earned the 2009 Environmental Stewardship Region III Award from the National Cattlemen's Beef Association.

"Bob is what you'd call an everyday environmentalist," says Dave Petty, chairman of the Environmental Stewardship Award selection committee. "By integrating his farming and cattle production, he is able to diversify his operation, making it viable and sustainable."

Bob and wife Sue have raised four children on their family farm. Son Matthew has expressed interest in joining the operation, which consists of 330 acres of owned land and 100 acres of leased land. Corn, wheat, soybeans, hay, straw, firewood and 100 head of Angus make Eckenfels Farm a diversified operation. The family also markets corn-fed and grass-fed finished beef directly to the consumer.

Bob is a progressive adopter of new ideas and technologies that benefit and protect soil and water resources. He has implemented an intensive grazing system, where cattle are rotated through fescue-clover and warm-season grass paddocks. He's also fencing his ponds to exclude livestock. To establish good quail habitat on the farm, he enrolled several acres in Conservation Reserve Program CP33, "Habitat Buffers for Upland Birds."

**TRIED-AND-TRUE STEWARD:** Bob Eckenfels has worked with Missouri NRCS conservationists to adopt new ideas that protect his Sainte Genevieve farm's soil and water resources.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CHARLIE PAHM, NRCS

Bob plants his crops using no-till, which has proven to increase his returns and minimize erosion. He has installed water diversions and watering systems through the state cost-share program with the Sainte Genevieve County Soil and Water Conservation District. He plants giant cane to act as a buffer and streambank stabilizer.

Sue leads recycling efforts on their farm, encouraging all family members

to recycle aluminum cans, paper and plastic, and pick up trash along their county roads.

Perhaps Bob's greatest asset to environmental stewardship is one-on-one persuasion. He's able to educate others about what works. He has coordinated a pasture tour for the Heartland Forage Council and was instrumental in developing the Sainte Genevieve County Conservation Field Day. This summer,

he plans to host a group from Kentucky.

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service nominated the Eckenfels farm for the NCBA award. "We have partnered with NRCS to apply conservation practices and often rely on their advice," Bob says.

■ **Read more about NRCS' working relationship with Missouri farmers on pages 4 and 5.**



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