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Ray and Susan Flickner Receive Kansas Leopold Conservation Award

Ray and Susan Flickner of Wichita have been selected as the recipients of the 2023 Kansas Leopold Conservation Award®.

Given in honor of renowned conservationist Aldo Leopold, the award recognizes farmers, ranchers and forestland owners who inspire others with their dedication to land, water, and wildlife resources in their care.

In [Kansas](#) the award is presented annually by [Sand County Foundation](#) and national sponsor [American Farmland Trust](#), with state partners: [Kansas Association of Conservation Districts](#) and the [Ranchland Trust of Kansas](#).

The Flickner family farms in McPherson, Hodgeman, Dickinson, and Norton counties. Their Flickner Innovation Farm is a collaboration of university, industry, and agency partners where new methods to improve soil health and conserve water are demonstrated. They were announced as the recipient of the award at the Kansas Association of Conservation Districts' 79th Annual Convention in Wichita and receive \$10,000 and a crystal award for being selected.

Earlier this year, Kansas landowners were encouraged to apply (or be nominated) for the award. Applications were reviewed by an independent panel of agricultural and conservation leaders. Among the many outstanding Kansas landowners nominated for the award were finalists: Kevin Karr of Emporia, Janus Farms of Cherryvale, and Glenn and Barbara Walker of Brookville.

The first Kansas Leopold Conservation Award was presented to Sproul Ranch of Sedan in 2015. Last year's recipient was Michael Thompson of Alma. View all recipients at www.SandCountyFoundation.org/Kansas

The Leopold Conservation Award in Kansas is made possible thanks to the generous support of American Farmland Trust, Kansas Association of Conservation Districts, Ranchland Trust of Kansas, Sand County Foundation, Farm Credit Associations of Kansas, ITC Great Plains, Kansas

Department of Agriculture (Division of Conservation), Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, Kansas Forest Service, Green Cover Seed, McDonald's, The Nature Conservancy, USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service and a Kansas Leopold Conservation Award recipient.

In his influential 1949 book, *A Sand County Almanac*, Leopold called for an ethical relationship between people and the land they own and manage, which he called “an evolutionary possibility and an ecological necessity.”

Sand County Foundation presents the Leopold Conservation Award to private landowners in 27 states for extraordinary achievement in voluntary conservation. For more information, visit www.leopoldconservationaward.org.

ABOUT RAY AND SUSAN FLICKNER

Ray and Susan Flickner compare agricultural conservation to a long road, but it's a journey they've resolved to travel.

The Flickners are lifelong learners with master's degrees. They have channeled their education and experience into innovation on their Kansas farmland, and see conservation as critical to its environmental and economic resilience.

Ray has shared his knowledge as a speaker at the governor's conference on the future of water in Kansas, and before a U.S. Senate agriculture subcommittee on making conservation programs user-friendly for farmers.

Amid the 1980s farm crisis, the Flickners bought 220 acres of farmland in McPherson County that has been in Ray's family since the 1870s. They've added another 630 acres, and it's now known as Flickner Innovation Farm where more than a dozen university, industry, and agency partners explore new methods to improve soil health and conserve water.

Modern irrigation technology tested at the farm helps make good use of every drop of water in a drought-prone region. Switching from a flood irrigation system to sub-surface drip irrigation showed 40 percent less water use over a decade, compared to the county average. Real-time feedback on how much water will benefit every slice of a field is provided by plant-based water sensors and a ground-penetrating radar mounted to a center pivot irrigation system.

Crop yields have improved thanks to irrigation technology and the grid soil sampling the Flickners conduct every four years. The sampling shows where to apply nutrients and lime at varying rates to adjust the soil's pH level. Cover crops are grown to suppress weeds and improve soil health. These conservation practices have increased their soil's organic matter over time.

Water and soil conservation has long been a priority at Flickner Farms. Ray and Susan

recently rehabilitated shelter belts and windbreaks that his ancestors planted in the 1930s to prevent erosion. Ray credits his father with stopping the use of anhydrous ammonia fertilizer in the 1960s and switching from traditional to minimum and conservation tillage in the 1980s.

Over the years, Ray and Susan bought more farmland in three other counties (Dickinson, Hodgeman, and Norton), where annual rainfall and topographies vary widely. They have created pollinator habitat in areas not suitable for row crop farming, constructed miles of terraces, and built acres of grass waterways. A marginal five-acre tract was taken out of crop production and reseeded with grass to improve water quality and provide wildlife habitat. Other fields have benefited from using the Kansas Forest Service's conservation tree program to build windbreaks.

With assistance from their county conservation district, intermittent streams have been reshaped and seeded to brome grass. Grass waterways previously under an irrigation center pivot were relocated to field edges. Productivity is improved when large farm equipment can be maneuvered to limit hairpin turns where over-application of seed, fertilizer, and chemicals are more likely to occur.

Ray and Susan have turned their conservation ethic to 320 acres of Hodgeman County farmland that Susan acquired from her father's estate. In addition to redesigning its terraces, the farm features two playas. The Flickners are coordinating with the Natural Resources Conservation Service on how to best rehabilitate these important High Plains aquifer features. It's just the latest step to improve water resources in Kansas on a constantly evolving journey.

ACCOLADES

"The Flickners have made it a priority to constantly improve soil health and conserve water, while sharing their experiences and knowledge with neighbors and agricultural producers across the state of Kansas. They are most deserving of this award" said Mike Beam, Kansas Secretary of Agriculture.

"Ray has been a leader in adopting innovative practices over the years with it culminating in the Flickner Innovation Farm, where he has been able to share what he is learning with others," said Dan Meyerhoff, Kansas Association of Conservation Districts Executive Director. "Ray exemplifies the extraordinary commitment celebrated by the Leopold Conservation Award."

"Congratulations to the Flickners on their selection as the 2023 Kansas Leopold Conservation Award recipient," said Barth Crouch, Ranchland Trust of Kansas Board Chairman. "RTK is pleased to honor all of the recipients and nominees of this award, which recognizes the vital contributions of working agricultural lands to wildlife, clean water, and other natural resources in Kansas."

"These award recipients are examples of how Aldo Leopold's land ethic is alive and well today. Their dedication to conservation shows how individuals can improve the health of the land while producing food and fiber," said Kevin McAleese, Sand County Foundation President and CEO.

“As the national sponsor for Sand County Foundation’s Leopold Conservation Award, American Farmland Trust celebrates the hard work and dedication of Michael Thompson,” said John Piotti, AFT President and CEO. “At AFT we believe that conservation in agriculture requires a focus on the land, the practices and the people and this award recognizes the integral role of all three.”

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LEOPOLD CONSERVATION AWARD PROGRAM

The Leopold Conservation Award is a competitive award that recognizes landowner achievement in voluntary conservation. Sand County Foundation presents the award in California, Colorado, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Wisconsin, and in New England (Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont). www.leopoldconservationaward.org

AMERICAN FARMLAND TRUST

American Farmland Trust is the only national organization that takes a holistic approach to agriculture, focusing on the land itself, the agricultural practices used on that land, and the farmers and ranchers who do the work. AFT launched the conservation agriculture movement and continues to raise public awareness through its No Farms, No Food message. Since its founding in 1980, AFT has helped permanently protect over 6.8 million acres of agricultural lands, advanced environmentally sound farming practices on millions of additional acres and supported thousands of farm families. www.farmland.org

KANSAS ASSOCIATION OF CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

The Kansas Association of Conservation Districts is a voluntary, non-governmental, non-profit, incorporated organization composed of members from the conservation districts located throughout Kansas’ 105 counties. Through partnerships with federal, state, and local entities, the Kansas Association of Conservation Districts has brought together groups that share the common goal of wise and efficient conservation practices that protect Kansas’ natural resources. The Kansas Association of Conservation Districts promotes and supports the establishment of programs dedicated to conservation and the organized development of Kansas land, water, and related resources. www.kacdnet.org

RANCHLAND TRUST OF KANSAS

The Ranchland Trust of Kansas is a private, non-profit organization founded by members of the Kansas Livestock Association in 2003. The organization was created to provide assistance to rancher and landowners who desire to conserve their land with conservation easements. Guided by their mission to preserve Kansas’ ranching heritage and open spaces for future generations through the conservation of working landscapes, the Ranchland Trust of Kansas values a commitment to conservation, respect for private landownership, integrity, organizational

excellence, and collaboration with those who share their values. The Ranchland Trust of Kansas remains an affiliate of the Kansas Livestock Association. www.ranchlandtrustofkansas.org

SAND COUNTY FOUNDATION

Sand County Foundation inspires and empowers a growing number of private landowners to ethically manage natural resources in their care, so future generations have clean and abundant water, healthy soil to support agriculture and forestry, plentiful habitat for wildlife and opportunities for outdoor recreation. www.sandcountyfoundation.org