

OUTSIDE THE BOX

Build a legacy of soil stewardship, human excellence

by Tom Field, University of Nebraska



The questions that matter certainly change as we move through life. Pondering what

was on the lunch menu might dominate the mind of a second-grader, while figuring out how to earn enough money to buy the first car might seem mission-critical to a 16-year-old. Early in our lives, transactional thinking focused on shorter-term goals, and immediate outcomes tend to dominate.

While transactional approaches are important, if we remain locked in on the short term, where success is measured by “this for that” outcomes, we miss the greatest opportunity for meaning.

Longer-term focus

When our brains shift to questions related to legacy, we begin to balance our thinking relative to what we receive, and the gifts offered to the next generation. How will our lives be remembered? Will our impact be measured as a series of

transactions or as a catalyst for positive transformation?

For those fortunate enough to be rooted to both community and landscape, a lasting legacy is forged in the strength, health and resilience of both human relationships and natural resources. These two realms — people and soil — are inextricably bound together if lasting value is our goal.

A community of exceptional people without a healthy soil resource is not sustainable. Simultaneously, healthy soils can only be balanced with the need for productive landscapes when people apply their creative energy to the challenge. The welding of these attributes lays the foundation upon which the legacy of graziers has been built.

Cultivating good

Samuel Lloyd Noble, a pioneer and innovation leader who focused much of his energy and wealth on the health of communities and soil, stated in a 1948 speech “that we agree that every deed begins in the hearts and souls of individuals; that

the rights in government belong primarily to the private citizen and not to the state; that the family is the cornerstone of all communities, states and nations; that no nation has ever, since known recorded history, outlived the fertility of the soil ...”

The application of our talent and focus to the thoughtful cultivation of both people and soil offers perhaps the greatest opportunity to build a lasting legacy.

“The only true happiness must come from not only understanding your own needs, but an understanding and willingness to secure the same things for your fellow man.”

This was the inspired vision of Mr. Noble that would lead to the creation of the Noble Research Institute, and a calling that speaks to us some 70 years later.

Cultivation is to apply diligent effort and creativity with the understanding that today’s endeavors are deeply connected to tomorrow’s outcomes. There is

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both a season for planting and a season for reaping. The principles of cultivation can only be applied with a sense of patience in the context of expectant hope.

The cultivation of a native grassland with the thoughtful application of grazing, the nurturing of the next leader for your organization, or even the cultivation of a new idea from concept to reality will require time. There is simply no substitute for prolonged and focused effort.

As a case in point, consider that the U.S. beef cow inventory peaked in 1996 with an annual beef production of 42 billion pounds (lb.). Since that time we have dropped cow numbers by approximately 4.5 million head, while increasing national beef production by more than 1 billion lb. A dedicated focus on cultivating a more productive beef herd made this story possible.

We have created a legacy of great cattle — now we must turn our attention to building a lasting legacy of soil stewardship and cultivating human excellence. May we be inspired by the words of Samuel Lloyd Noble: “Every deed begins in the hearts and souls of individuals.” |



Editor’s note: In “Outside the Box,” a regular, separate column in both the *Angus Journal*® and the *Angus Beef Bulletin*, author Tom Field shares his experience as a cattleman and his insightful perspective on the business aspects of ranching. Field is director of the Engler Agribusiness Entrepreneurship Program at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, where he holds the Paul Engler Chair of Agribusiness Entrepreneurship.