

CASE STUDY:

Deborah Clark, Birdwell Clark Ranch

Ranch Overview:

Located in north-central Texas near the Red River, Deborah Clark and her husband, Emry Birdwell, manage 12,000 acres of native tallgrass prairie at the Birdwell and Clark Ranch. The landscape features a rich mix of little bluestem, switchgrass, Indiangrass and eastern gamagrass, interspersed with seasonal creeks and riparian areas that support wildlife like wild turkey, white-tailed deer and bald eagles.

When the couple purchased the property in 2000, it had been managed conventionally and was largely a monoculture of little bluestem with significant bare ground. Over the past two decades, their work has transformed it into a thriving, biodiverse ecosystem that exemplifies what long-term regenerative management can achieve on working rangeland.

“**Taking care of this land is not just about what we produce — it’s about what we protect. Regeneration means ensuring this ranch will stay whole, healthy, and working long after we’re gone.**” — Deborah Clark

Regenerative Journey:

Deborah and Emry began ranching together after her career in telecommunications and construction wound down in the early 2000s. Though Emry had studied under Allan Savory in the 1980s and practiced holistic management principles for decades, Birdwell and Clark Ranch gave them a chance to fully implement those ideas on a large scale.

They started by restructuring the ranch’s 14 large pastures into about 140 paddocks using single-strand, high-tensile electric fencing. By rotating cattle frequently — sometimes moving herds four to six times a day during the growing season — they began to mimic the natural movement of bison herds. The results have been striking: plant diversity has flourished, bare ground has decreased from an estimated 25% to less than 5%, and wildlife habitat has expanded dramatically.

During the 2011–2015 drought, they consolidated three separate herds into one large group of 3,400 cattle to maximize recovery periods for the land. This shift revealed just how powerful rest and rotation could be, setting the tone for their ongoing adaptive approach.

In recent years, they’ve continued evolving — adding 3,000 sheep and a few goats to diversify their grazing impact and experimenting with mobile water troughs made from repurposed propane tanks to reach underused areas. They’ve also enrolled in a carbon sequestration program and placed the ranch under a conservation easement to ensure it remains an intact, regenerative working landscape for generations to come.



Stewardship & Ranch Management Philosophy:

- **Mimic natural systems:** Move cattle often to simulate herd behavior and promote plant and soil recovery.
- **Protect and regenerate:** Maintain living roots year-round, increase plant diversity and reduce bare ground through intentional rest periods.
- **Adapt with age:** Adjust operations and embrace new enterprises — like sheep — while planning for long-term succession.
- **Defend working lands:** Engage in conservation easements, advocacy and legal efforts to protect ranchlands from development pressures.



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Deborah Clark.