Native Grass Seeds Can Restore Rangelands
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**Curly Coated Critter Memories**

When our Son was 6 years old he found a can of red paint and a brush and he decorated the door going into a goat shed with a sign that read "GOATS $." Even at that early age he figured that Mom and Dad must be doing OK with the goats or they wouldn't spend so much time with them. The sweet innocence of youth!

Many moons have passed since then. I remember the first time I saw the curly coated critters--it was at the Fort Worth Stock Show where I was hoping to win a ribbon on a fat calf I had raised. The Boss was on a pass from Tarleton College military corps at Stephenville. He had taken a day off to come to the show. We renewed our old acquaintances as we wandered around the grounds. He said he wanted to show me something over in the sheep tent, where he pointed to a pen full of Angora goats--said they had lots of them at his home in the hills.

As it turned out we managed to team up for life and have spent a good share of it raising Angora goats. For better or worse there is something about the critters that makes it hard to let them go. Maybe it's just hard headedness (I think it must be in the stars--too much Capricorn) or worse there is something about the critters that makes it hard to let them go. Maybe it's just hard headedness (I think it must be in the stars--too much Capricorn). The Boss says it's more of an affliction. Maybe it's poor publicity. For most of our early years this publication was called "The Sheep & Goat Raiser Magazine." I don't know why the name was changed. Sign of the times I guess. I miss the old days with the pictures and stories of early day herders and the articles about different drenches and lice control and billy goat selection and so on.

Then there was the big surge in popularity and the lazy goats were in demand all over the world. I guess politics played a big hand in our demise. Those were exciting times though; who knows if they will ever come back?

In our own case it's more of a matter of too many miles on the old wagon. We keep telling the kids that we are giving up--the goats will have to go--but they don't believe us.

After all, we must think of the guard dogs. They might just run away from home if there were not any curly coated chivos to look after!

I am supposed to check in at an Austin hospital for a new knee next week. Sure hope it helps the old mobility problem. :)

By Jean Ebeling
Restoring Rangeland: Native American Seed

Can you imagine West Texas as a vast sea of native grasses and forbs supporting deer, antelope and thousands upon thousands of buffalo? All early accounts tell the same story, Texas rangelands were practically treeless, lush with growth and productive. Of course, to maintain their state, the prairies and deserts at the time were periodically swept clean with severe, naturally occurring fires. The huge buffalo herds came through seasonally and heavily grazed the prairie growth and trampled upon and churned up the prairie soils. All the natural elements of grassland production were in a kind of equilibrium. And the result was exceptional rangeland.

But with settlement came farming, fences, cattle, sheep, goats, overgrazing, fire control, spread of mesquite, surges in cedar growth, and intentional and unintentional introduction of non-native invasive species. Health of the native prairies and desert grasslands declined over the years of use.

Restoration of rangeland is recognized now as essential to our livestock production and ranching industry. Researchers and extension agents and personnel have thankfully turned their efforts and energies toward promoting such activity and toward helping individual ranchers and ranching families in caring for their range.

The founder of Native American Seed, Bill Neiman, and his family went into business 20 years ago supporting the effort to restore prairies and rangelands with native species. They’re still around today and stronger than ever. Headquartered in Junction, Texas, they sell seeds they annually harvest from stands of native growth, both pristine prairie areas and cultivated farms of native stock.

Bill and wife Jan Neiman started their business in 1989 in the blackland prairie and cross timbers area of Texas. They sell seeds they annually harvest from stands of native growth, both pristine prairie areas and cultivated farms of native stock. The business of locating, harvesting and selling native wildflower and grass seeds occurred to them not because of an ideology or as an abstract idea, but out of years of experience in landscape construction and the nursery business. Bill had hydro-mulched, seeded, sodded and irrigated untold acres of Bermuda and St. Augustine grass in the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex area. But he knew that native grasses and plants fit in better with the ecosystem and were more sustainable—and economical in the long run—because they required less water than the typical lawn grasses.

“It is time to redefine landscaping,” Bill says. “Americans currently use on their urban lawns more natural resources than are used in the agricultural production of the entire continents of Africa and India combined.”

In 1995 Bill and Jan moved the business to a place on the Llano River near Junction. There a team of dedicated staff working toward Native American Seed’s mission of helping people restore rangelands and thus improve the health of the planet, sows and harvies native grasses, forbs and wildflowers. They take seed orders from all over, mostly via their Web site, according to daughter Emily, who maintains the site along with other company duties.

They source native seed from other locations as well. A big part of Bill Neiman’s work still consists of scouting the landscape from...
Daisy, Foxglove, Gayfeather, Golden-Wave, Greenthread, Indian Blanket, Mealy Blue Sage, Missouri Primrose, Purple Prairie Clover, Texas Bluebonnet and Standing Cypress. Another is the Comanche Mix, matched to the climate and rainfall from the southwestern Hill Country to the Rolling Plains, containing Greenthread, Huisache Daisy, Indian Blanket, Lazy Daisy, Prairie Verbena, Texas Bluebonnet and Lemon Mint.

The Western Rangeland Mix, Blackland Prairie Mix, Coastal Prairie Mix and Eastern Savannah Grass Mix each contain native seeds suitable for the area the names describe. The Web site at seedsource.com is worth a visit to view the various varieties and mixes the company offers.

Emily Neiman adds that what makes their company different from other seed companies is “our commitment to offering only those plants that are native to our bioregion. Native American Seed understands that every ecosystem is a delicate web of relationships that have evolved over centuries. And humans, with all their power of creativity and imagination, must respect the wisdom of those centuries before entering into the processes of nature as active participants.”

“Native American Seed wants to provide alternatives for people who would actually like to DO something about their environment.”

Native American Seed works to produce ecological conservation harvests on Texas' last great prairies. This local approach plays a valuable role in preserving unique genetic richness and diversity in the seeds we offer. These seeds are useful in land and wildlife habitat restoration, sustainable grazing and prairie conservation.

Native American Seed is a family-owned business. It was born in a space we created out behind the barn on our little 7-acre patch of prairie remnant in Argyle, Texas. When our son Weston came along to join his sister Emily, it was clearly time to move our office out of the house.

We moved to the outskirts of the Texas Hill Country in the summer of 1995, where we found a beautiful place on the Llano River just outside the town of Junction and later converted a building in Junction to our office headquarters.

What makes us different from many other wildflower seed companies is our commitment to offering superior customer service, and only those plants that are native to our bioregion.

Shop online at our website to purchase native grass seed blends perfect for your region or climate in Texas. One example is our “Caliche Mix,” containing grasses that do well in low moisture areas. This seed mix contains Blue Grama, Buffalograss, Green Sprangletop, Indiangrass, Little Bluestem, Prairie Wildrye, Sand Lovegrass, Sideata Grama, Sand Dropseed, Texas Cupgrass, Cune Bluestem and Carby Mesquite. For more packages or individual plant species selections, visit www.seedsource.com.
Pour yourself a cup o' coffee and I'll tell ya a story . . .

I guess you've figured by now, we are all in this together. Whether we farm or ranch, build or develop, design or construct, landscape or maintain, home-own or recreate on property . . . we are all, in effect . . . profoundly influencing the management of the land.

Our day-to-day decisions lead to our actions (or lack of action) . . . and slowly over time the accumulation of our work comes into view. But in order to view "the grass issue" . . . one must first realize a human lifespan is a wee bit short. To focus on the long-term changes of grassland health over 5 or 10 decades is a difficult task. In today's reality, it is pretty hard to know the land . . . especially when so much of one's time is spent rolling on concrete.

And that is why I want to share my story. I've been here in Texas goin' on 80 years now. Seen good times when a nickel in town would get me into the Saturday night picture show. Seen times out in West Texas when the pastures stretched out as far as the eye could venture. Seen times in East Texas when a man could raise a family on what a quarter section, 160 acres, could produce.

We used to drink the water straight off the creeks and there was always a place to camp or fish or hunt . . . just had to ask polite of the rancher or farmer . . . and they'd size you up right there on the spot.

Honesty was our day's measurin' stick. But as time went, I saw the strong get stronger during the depression . . . and even as the dust flew and the prices fell, we kept on keepin' on. I guess we had no choice. We lived by our farms and cattle. When the prices went down, we had to produce more just to keep up. And seems like those prices never did come back up. We know not to waste much of anything.

Then another dry spell took a toll during the '50s. Lookin' back now, I can almost see the mesquite brush, huisache, tallow and the cedar brakes startin' to really come on . . . course I didn't see it at the time. Back when we lived and worked the land, why . . . cedar was a big part of all our fences . . . and value was realized by the hard cuttin' of it for the posts and stays . . .

But now, it seems, almost all at once, those days are gone. The old family farms and their soils did finally play out. Sold off most of the cattle because the grass ran out. The creeks dried up and the hills began to scour and wash after each rain. Li'l by li'l we are cuttin' deep into the land now, which in turn lowers the water table and the springs no longer flow.

It was during the last generation where most all the kids grew up and moved to Dallas or Fort Worth and got'em a 'good job' . . . and all those fences, when they fell down, were rebuilt with Chinese steel T-posts, and the cedar sprouts have taken over the thin soils on the rocky uplands . . . and the mesquines, they take to the flats on the better soils. And still though, the grass is gone; for it is being shaded and out-competed for water by all the brush. Here in the west, I think we've probably brought on more of the desert . . . during three men's lives—my dad's, mine, and now my son's.

None of us really meant to do this mistakenly. We didn't understand the people before us and the care of the land. We had no practical guides to follow, like the one in your hand. And we didn't see the value of the grass, like you can see . . . today.

By Bill Neiman

Founder of Native American Seed, Bill Neiman grew up in west Texas while learning from his father about nature and all things native.

‘The first rule of intelligent tinkering is to save all the pieces.’
—Aldo Leopold

Photographer, Bill Neiman by Amy Lee, at an event near Sierra Blanca, Texas.