

## Bruce Kokes named 2011 Outstanding Regional Colorado Young Farmer

With farm ground that lays under one of the largest wind tower farms in the nation, Bruce Kokes has grown accustomed to the frequent “whosh” he hears as he moves across his homestead north of Crook, CO. Kokes has found a wonderful way to combine his cattle business with wind, wheat, hay, dryland corn and summer fallow crops, topped off with a sideline agriculture construction enterprise.

For his entrepreneurial successes, he has been chosen the Outstanding Colorado Young Farmer for 2011.

Kokes, 52, who hails from the northeast region of the state, has turned his family’s operation into a diversified labor of love. He began his own farming career in 1978 renting 640 acres of country from his father--420 acres of grass and 200 acres of dryland farm ground, mainly wheat and millet hay. He purchased 30 cows and when he took that first calf crop to town and received a dollar a pound on a nice group averaging 523 pounds per head, he thought he was in heaven. He also wondered if he’d ever see that kind of price again.

Today, he and his wife Kathy run 100 mother cows on 2200 acres of grassland, most of it land he owns. He works 900 acres of dryland farm ground where he plants a third of it in wheat, a third in hay and dryland corn and the last third is summer fallow.

When their oldest son, Levi, 28, returned from the military and decided he wanted to also farm, Bruce and Kathy made room to bring him into the operation. Levi now owns 45 cows and trades labor on the farm for the feed and grazing of his herd.

The older Kokes knew he had children that might want to come back to the operation. In part planning for this, and also an economic necessity, in 2004 he diversified his operation to include doing small construction jobs for others, primarily work related to agriculture. He initially built bird guzzlers for the Natural Resources Conservation Services (NCRS) Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). When the wind companies came to his area and began leasing tower sites, he saw a niche and contracted with these companies to build cattle guards on location. Today, he and Levi continue to do some of this



Bruce Kokes  
Outstanding Northeastern Region Colorado Young Farmer  
(l to r) Kathy Kokes, Bruce Kokes and Greg Winter  
representing Syngenta Seeds–Golden Harvest.

wind park work, but also contract with others to build fencing and small buildings. This diversification has made it possible for both generations to work together to financially support the family’s cattle and crop production activities. Kathy also holds an outside job at nearby Cabela’s in Sidney, NE which contributes to the household budget.

Over the years Kokes has changed his farming practices to no till for better conservation of soil and water. The father-son team does much of its own equipment upkeep. Bruce received a degree in

diesel mechanics years ago and says this has been a huge factor in helping keep equipment maintenance and repair costs down. A large shop on the farm provides a perfect place for winter repair work.

There are others in the family that want to be, and are involved on the farm. He and Kathy also have a set of twins, a daughter Brittney and son Brett, now age 26. Brittney is married to Travis Cook and they have two sons. They show up to help with harvest each year and bring grandkids around frequently so that grandpa and grandma can help acclimate them to agriculture.

Bruce Kokes has been involved with the Young Farmer organization since 1976, before he even started farming on his own. He has been a member of three chapters since that time, the Crook Young Farmers, the Caliche Young Farmers and most recently the Northeastern Junior College Young Farmers. He’s done his fair share of leading efforts to organize and participate in ladies night events, tractor pulls, pedal pulls, human pulls, consignment auctions and state and national institutes. He’s held nearly every local and state office available and he’s done them well. In 1995 he was named the National Reporter of the Year. He has enough chapter awards to cover a living room wall.

When he isn’t doing something with Young Farmers, Bruce helps with the Crook volunteer fire department and fire district as a volunteer and an officer. He sits on an FFA advisory board, a fair board, and a Premier Farm Credit board. He is chairman of the Northern Colorado Wind Project and helps with the Farm/Ranch Information Program for Wind Parks. He is an active member of the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association and the Northeast Colorado Cattle Association.