

land we love

PHOTOGRAPHED BY John Fielder



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“Y

oung ranchers are an endangered species,” Ben Rogers told a U.S. Senate committee when they were considering ranching reform. With soaring land values and crazy debt service, “in no way, shape or form can any young person start out in ranching in today’s world; it’s not possible.” To him, the demise of ranchers means “We’re in danger of losing some of the best fabric that this nation has.”

Ben owns the Russell Ranch in Colorado, which lies along the banks of the White River. The ranch got its start in 1907 when valley land was acquired by Robert and Nellie Russell.

Their great-grandson Ben understands that the land is willing to be your partner if you treat it well. “The land is a living, breathing, organism,” he says, his voice getting a little softer. “Every year it rejuvenates itself. We have snow and that moisture turns the grass green in the summer and the cows eat it, but that plant has got the ability to regenerate. ... I never take this land for granted.”

Ben is considering his options with the Colorado Cattlemen’s Agricultural Land Trust, which in partnership with more than 210 landowners has protected over 330,000 acres in 35 Colorado counties.

Ben would hate to sell. Hate it because of the debt he feels to the people who came before him and the responsibility he feels to the ones who will be here after him. 

Adapted from *Ranches of Colorado* by John Fielder; text by James Meadow. Colorado Cattlemen’s Agricultural Land Trust, Colorado Open Lands and the Colorado Coalition of Land Trusts will earn royalties from each copy of the book sold. www.johnfielder.com