



## #FridaysOnTheFarm: Veteran Returns to Farming Roots

Each Friday, visit local farms, ranches, forests, and resource areas through our [#FridaysOnTheFarm](#) stories. Meet farmers, producers, and landowners who are working to improve their operations with USDA programs.

This Friday meet Bill Renfroe, an Air Force veteran in Lovelock, Nevada, who can now add “beginning farmer” to his resume. While Bill had initially dreamt of retiring somewhere green, that vision unfolded into fields of green alfalfa in northwestern Nevada.

### Life After the Air Force

Growing up on a dairy farm in nearby Fallon, Nevada, Bill got up at 3 a.m. and worked hard to grow alfalfa. He joined the Air Force at the recommendation of a friend. To Bill, it sounded like a good break from the rigor of the dairy farm and a great opportunity for him and his young wife, Vivian, who were expecting their first child.

His career spanned nearly 37 years, and he retired as a full colonel. He’s worked several overseas assignments, at the Pentagon, and rounded out his career working for the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

With Vivian at his side, they’ve lived in 23 homes, including in Portugal, Germany and England. When Vivian wanted to spend her retirement back in Nevada, Bill never imagined that he’d end up a farmer.

The couple bought some land in Lovelock and renovated the historic 1913 home that sits on the property. A commercial farmer worked the alfalfa fields for a few years, but opted to retire, leaving Bill with a decision to make.

“The opportunity was there. I bought some equipment and started farming myself,” said Bill. “I never thought I was going to be a farmer ever again. But it gives me something to do, and I found I enjoyed it, so I’ve grown.”

### On a Mission with USDA

Bill began participating in [Farm Service Agency](#) programs, including the [Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage Program](#), as well as the [Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program](#) for native grazing. He learned more about USDA’s programs after being elected to his local [FSA county committee](#).

He enrolled in the [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#) when Christie Scilacci, a district conservationist for USDA’s [Natural Resources Conservation Service](#), looked at his property and discussed benefits offered to [beginning farmers and veteran farmers](#).



“Between Bill’s two properties, he has 320 acres in alfalfa production,” said Christie. “Water is a precious commodity in this area, and his headgates and crossgates were dilapidated, allowing water to leak out of the old gates. Through EQIP, he was able to replace and install new ones.”

### **Saving Time and Water**

In Lovelock, farmers are allocated water and use flood irrigation to irrigate their fields. Bill has clocked a significant time savings with his new headgates and crossgates.

“Watering the 200 acres at my one property is now 40-48 hours quicker every time, which can result in an entire extra irrigation every year,” said Bill. “This is the first time I’ve ever been able to water a fourth crop. And I still have water left over, which means more water stays in the dam for next year. During limited water years it will keep my plants alive.”

In years past, depending on water availability, Bill has had to transfer water from one property to another to keep his crops.

“Last year I had to transfer water and got three cuttings. But this year, with my new gates installed, I didn’t have to transfer water,” said Bill. “I knew it would improve my water pressure and save me water – but I didn’t know it would save me that much water. I’m very thankful. It made a big difference.”

Bill also received cost-share on culverts to allow access across his ditches. Previous culverts were too small and backed up the water. Culverts also were installed at the end of a field to improve drainage.

“This program has been an absolute godsend for us here on the farm,” said Bill. “It’s made my property much more productive, and I’m just so thankful there’s a program like this for beginning farmers. I couldn’t have done it without NRCS.”

### **More Information**

USDA offers a variety of risk management, disaster assistance, loan, and conservation programs to help agricultural producers in the United States. [Learn about additional programs.](#)

For more information about USDA programs and services, [contact your local USDA service center.](#)

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