

Commissioner of Agriculture's Award for Conservation Excellence

Awarded to a Conservation District Supervisor/Conservation Partner who has demonstrated excellence in one or more of the following areas:

- **Leadership that brings dollars and resources to the district and to benefit the land**
- **Volunteers in service for the conservation community**
- **Serves in various capacities and assists in sustaining Colorado's agricultural industry**
- **Strives to further the collective goals of the conservation community to benefit more of Colorado's natural resources**
- **Successful in developing conservation partnerships**
- **Provides a vision for the future of agriculture and the conservation movement**
- **Fosters future conservation leaders**
- **Practices good conservation on their own land**

As most of you know, one of the Department of Agriculture's Wildly Important Goals is to support the next generation of farmers/ranchers and people who work to improve our working landscapes. With that in mind, it gives me great pleasure to present this year's Conservation Excellence award to Ben Berlinger, a highly regarded and respected, retired Area Range Specialist for NRCS. For over 40 years Ben has been dedicated to and immersed in supporting the next generation of Colorado citizens in beginning careers in Natural Resources Management, Ranching and Farming.

There are hundreds of range managers in their teens, twenties, thirties and even forties who credit Ben Berlinger with helping them find their way in their careers. I'm told that Ben's career started with a summer job with the US Forest Service and a Range Conservationist that mentored him - pointed him to go to CSU. Since he never could repay that mentor who provided great guidance to him in the summer of his senior year of high school, so Ben made his mark by helping young people learn about rangeland management through plant identification and range judging all these years since he started his career with NRCS in 1975. Steadily throughout those nearly 45 years he continues to facilitate week long summer camps, workshops, and competitions such as Camp Rocky, FFA Rangeland Judging, Envirothon and the SRM High School Youth Forum. Year after year over 300 high school FFA students participate in Rangeland Judging competitions led by Ben Berlinger. Perhaps some of you in this audience learned from Ben or have kids or grandkids that Ben has mentored.

Colorado is a beautiful state with productive rangelands, forests and croplands that support diverse ecosystems and rural economies. It's people like Ben Berlinger who have dedicated their lives to the stewardship of these resources and to fostering youth to be the next generation of ranchers and land managers that keep Colorado the beautiful, productive state that it is. That is why it felt appropriate to fly a Colorado State flag above our state Capitol in honor of Ben. This flag flew on October 25, 2019 and comes with a certificate, signed by Governor Polis to commemorate Ben's contributions.