



## Land Ethic Mentorship

For Historically Underserved Farmers & Ranchers

# MEET THE MENTEES

Jean Lam, Temple, Oklahoma



Jean Lam

“.....

*The essence of  
who I am is tied to  
the soil and being  
a proper steward  
of the land and its  
animals.”*

.....”

Jean Lam farms and ranches with her husband on 3500-acres in southwestern Oklahoma. On their dryland farm, they grow wheat and cotton alongside their commercial and registered Angus cow/calf herds. Jean’s primary focus is on beef cattle, including a winter stocker program.

### Her Story

Jean Lam is a fourth-generation farmer and rancher, and member of the Choctaw Nation. Growing up, her family rotationally grew corn, soybean, wheat, and alfalfa, which instilled in Jean a deep commitment to a land ethic. But she didn’t think that would mean farming or ranching as a career in her future. Instead, she focused her efforts on policy, and earned a degree from Stanford University, intending to pursue a career in law or public policy.



After several years working in policy, Jean brought her ambitions back to the land, and started farming on leased acres in addition to her father’s land. In October 2022, Jean married another farmer, and moved her equipment and land ethic to Thompson Farms in Temple, Oklahoma.

Jean is already implementing many conservation practices on her own farm. She has installed vegetative grass field borders, established pollinator habitat, and began cover cropping. She practices rotational grazing using cross-fencing, and bale grazes in the winter to increase organic matter.





## JEAN'S ADVICE FOR NEW FARMERS:

*Ask and trust. Never be afraid to ask a question regardless of how seemingly fundamental it may seem. Learning from others' mistakes can accelerate your own success. Also, trust yourself, trust the land, and trust the animals. Nature has a way of forgiving our faults and revealing it's needs if we pay attention and work together.*



### Her Mentor

Jim Kopriva and his wife, Karen, of Kopriva Angus in Raymond, South Dakota, were the 2012 South Dakota Leopold Conservation Award Recipients. With their two children, they farm 2,000 acres of owned and leased land. Much of their land is native rangeland, seeded pastures, and hay ground. Even though their farms are almost 800 miles apart, Jean and Jim have developed a deep, trusting relationship, based on their similarities and shared values.

Their relationship has helped Jean navigate several situations, from questions about implementing specific conservation practices, to business decisions. Jean's long-term goal is to develop her herd genetics and become a reputable cow-calf producer, with reliable genetics trusted by the community. She had an opportunity to buy a herd of registered Angus cows, but before she made the investment, she consulted Jim. He thought it might be a good idea but wanted to see the registration papers. After Jean sent him the papers, he called her. "He told me about some red flags he saw in the paperwork and recommended that I pass it up," Jean says. Without his guidance, Jean says she would have probably made the purchase with potentially disastrous consequences for her business.

When Jean was considering installing an alternate watering facility for livestock, including drilling a well, she didn't go to her father, a successful farmer in his own right. "He was too close to the situation. I wanted a new perspective." Instead, she asked Jim for his insight, especially on the financial aspects. She

felt he was genuinely invested in her success, with no strings attached. "Jim is good at meeting me where I am. He's able to reflect back on his choices and decisions and adjust his advice to meet my needs."

### Lessons Learned

Perhaps the greatest lesson learned from Jean's mentor Jim, was on maintaining focus. Running a diversified operation with multiple agriculture enterprises, Jean was always calling or texting Jim with an array of different questions or scenarios. Early on, Jim advised Jean that when making any decision, whether about cattle or conservation, it's best to frame it against the mission of her farm and assess whether it fit the focus of achieving that mission. This insight has helped Jean make more deliberate and sound decisions that ensure the fiscal and environmental sustainability of her farm.

### What is Next?

Jean hopes to ensure the sustainability of her farm through a continued commitment to environmental stewardship while also increasing the quality of beef raised. These guiding principles greatly influence her land ethic for the betterment of her community and future generations of her family.

Enroll Now!

**Learn more and sign up for this free mentorship opportunity at:**  
[sandcountyfoundation.org/mentorship](https://sandcountyfoundation.org/mentorship)  
**or contact Nikki D'Adamo-Damery at:**  
[nikki@sandcountyfoundation.org](mailto:nikki@sandcountyfoundation.org)



**Natural Resources  
Conservation Service**

The Land Ethic Mentorship program serves historically underserved (socially disadvantaged, beginning, limited resource, and veteran) farmers and ranchers with resources to support their conservation and production goals. Sand County Foundation's network of Leopold Conservation Award-winning farmers and ranchers, who have been recognized for extraordinary conservation achievement, serve as program mentors. Mentors support their mentees as they develop their conservation and agricultural practices to balance farm productivity, ecosystem health, and community wellbeing.



**Sand County Foundation** inspires and empowers a growing number of land owners and managers to ethically care for the land to sustain water resources, build healthy soil, enhance wildlife habitat, and support outdoor recreation.

[www.sandcountyfoundation.org](https://www.sandcountyfoundation.org)