What began as a way to ‘eke out a living’ and an abundance of silage in the fall of 1975, a small, once family owned feedlot has grown into the largest feed yard in Garfield County and one of the larger commercial feed yards in the state of Nebraska. Bonsall Feedlot (Burwell Feeders) originated on the Williams place, nestled in the Rose Hill school district 5 miles north of Burwell under the care of Dennis and DeeDii Bonsall. The last forty plus years have brought a multitude of changes to the feed yard; like growing in every direction, adding technology and ownership changes.

Dennis began feeding a pen of steers for Stan Huffman of Whitman that fall of ’75 even though the family had no plan to speak of for making a living on his grandfather’s place. Although Dennis hated farming and irrigating, he quickly found out he liked feeding cattle. In his words, “I like to feed cattle and wanted to find a way to make a decent living at it so I decided to get in and do it right or get out”. And do it right they did. They expanded and evolved over the years and took a ‘no long term plan’ and built it into a successful feeding operation. Carol Jones was one of the first customers and has been a constant feeder to this day. Pens were always being added and DeeDii lost her garden plot. Fences kept going up and Marvin Murphy quipped that ‘we needed Christmas lights to trouble shoot the electric fences’. Bonsall Feedlot became a commercial feedlot in 1981 with a yard capacity of 3,000 head, topping out present day with a 15,000 head capacity limit.

Other additions included computerized feed records in ‘82, a new shop and office building in ‘89, and fence line bunks in the 90’s. All these improvements allowed for more cattle and with the cattle came partners in the business. Bonsall Feedlot became Burwell Feeders LLC in 2000 when a merger with Melvin, Harlan and James Weitzenkamp occurred. Dennis remained the general manager and the yard kept expanding. A feed mill and elevator were built in 2001, in 2004 a working circle alley and receiving and hospital pens were added as well as a new vet shed in 2005. New wells were put down. The corn pit was enlarged. Eating dust and tromping through mud became an everyday occurrence for Dennis and his employees.

As with any business, the feedlot faced some rough patches along the way. A tornado tore through the yard in June of 1986 and a great amount of damage was done to the pens but no cattle were lost. They were sorted differently in the end, but they were alive and hungry! The REA company wasted no time getting power and water restored. The summer of 1992 found a large hail storm hitting the feedlot and damaging all the equipment sitting outside but by winter all the glass had been replaced. One large blizzard found all the hired help sleeping on the house floor and another siege of cold weather one winter left Dennis checking the fuel supplies in the loader and tractors that were left running all night to ensure feeding could take place. High school boys often came out and scooped bunks when school was cancelled to make some extra money.

One of the roughest patches came when Dennis passed away unexpectedly in June of 2012. He gave back to his community in many ways serving on the school board and as president of the Garfield County Frontier Fair Association and was also involved with Nebraska’s Big Rodeo for years as a participant and volunteer. He had roped his share of calves and wrestled a few steers along the way and earned his PRCA card in 1972 and his gold PRCA card in 1992. He left some big shoes to fill and upon his passing, Burwell Feeders came under the sole ownership of the Weitzenkamps. After a time of transition, Russell Walker was hired as General Manager in 2013.

Burwell Feeders joined forces with Animal Health International in the summer of 2014 and a new era of technology expanded the feedlot again. AHI has a feedlot program that seamlessly transfers vet activity, bunk reading activity, mill activity and feed truck activity into the office computer. A micro machine incorporates the additives to feed with greater accuracy and all readings are uploaded to the billing system eliminating all hand entry. Having all the records streamlined allows for hundreds of reports and a much better flow among the departments. Russell, with Carmen Phillipps, office manager, developed a logo and began ‘branding’ the feedlot. The logo is used on all printed material, gifts, advertising and social media. Burwell Feeders moved into the age of social media with the creation of a website, [www.burwellfeederne.com](http://www.burwellfeederne.com) and a Facebook page. Be sure and check these sites out as they are very interesting!

The Weitzenkamps sold Burwell Feeders to Wesley, Thomas and Jason Thompson in April of 2017. The Thompson family also own Triple T Farms and T5 Trucking in Ord. The transition has been smooth one and new plans continue to hatch and develop for future success. Plans are being made to add another alley to west and another settling basin in the summer of 2018.

Burwell Feeders has been an integral part of the county over the last 40 years with employment opportunities. They currently employ 15 people; Russell Walker, Manager; Kregg Chilewski, Yard Forman; Carmen Phillipps, Office Manager; and Yard Staff, Marty Freeman, Joe Ivester, Beau Dilsaver, Tim Naab, Pat Yrkoski, Amanda Turley, Teckla Naab, Gene McBride, Brook Bradford, Scott Lytle, Dustin Bradley and Dan Hruza. The feedlot also owns a house in Burwell that is available for rent by feedlot employees. This has been an added benefit to both the yard and the employees as housing is often difficult to find in Burwell.

From no plan at all to a grand plan for the future, Burwell Feeders remains a growing feedlot with many opportunities for expansion, employment and ‘doing it right’.