*"Conservation can accomplish its objectives only when it springs from an impelling conviction on the part of private landowners."*

**Aldo Leopold, conservationist, landowner and author of "A Sand County Almanac"**

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Leopold Conservation Award®

PRESENTED BY SAND COUNTY FOUNDATION

2016

# Year in Review



Photo: Texas Parks & Wildlife

# LEOPOLD CONSERVATION AWARD® PROGRAM

The farmers, ranchers and foresters who own and manage the majority of land in the U.S. hold the key to meaningful environmental improvement in this nation. Sand County Foundation inspires and enables private landowners to exercise their individual responsibility to ethically manage the natural resources in their care.

In his famous *A Sand County Almanac*, renowned conservationist, landowner and scientist Aldo Leopold wrote, "the landscape of any farm is the owner's portrait of himself." Sand County Foundation's Leopold Conservation Award® Program honors landowners who live by the tenets of Leopold's land ethic. That is, a land ethic changes the role of people from conquerors of the land-community to members and citizens of it.

The award program celebrates commitment to improved land health as it recognizes farmers, ranchers and other landowners who are delivering conservation on their own land.

Working with partners and sponsors, Sand County Foundation presents the $10,000 award and a crystal depicting Aldo Leopold, in settings that showcase the landowner's conservation successes.

The award makes an impact by publicly recognizing extraordinary achievement in voluntary conservation, inspiring thousands of other landowners representing millions of acres, and influencing the general public's understanding of the importance of private working lands in conservation.

Their compelling stories become the basis for an active public information program that recognizes the environmental accomplishments of working farms, ranches and forests. These landowners truly encompass the American dream, creating a successful business while practicing conservation for the benefit of this and future generations.

Sand County Foundation and its many partners and sponsors actively seek others to become part of this important story. An award program of this stature could not exist without quality landowner nominees and contributions both large and small.

To learn more, visit www.leopoldconservationaward.org

Photo: Paolo Vescia

On the cover: Lone Star Ranch, 2016, California

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Whether it's bushels per acre, livestock weight or acres of wildlife habitat, singular focus on one aspect of production agriculture is to the detriment of the land and the landowner. Recognizing the need to see the whole picture of land health, Aldo Leopold pointed out that there is value in every aspect of "the land mechanism".

*If the land mechanism as a whole is good, then every part is good, whether we understand it or not. If the biota, in the course of aeons, has built something we like but do not understand, then who but a fool would discard seemingly useless parts? To keep every cog and wheel is the first precaution of intelligent tinkering." Round River – 1972*

Success stories of farmers, ranchers and foresters embracing biodiversity on their land make the case for Leopold's call for keeping the cogs and wheels. Landowners likely to be successful over the long-term consider how to keep the land mechanism and their particular operation working and stronger.

Indeed, it is apparent in many regions that biodiversity can go hand in hand with business diversity. For example, leading land stewards are working to bring back native species that were once thought to be useless, while adding new sources of income to their farms and ranches that benefit the land and their bottom line.

In this annual review of our 2016 Leopold Conservation Award® recipients, we offer stories of landowners engaging in conservation practices that are good for both business and the environment.

In 2017, as Sand County Foundation celebrates its 50th anniversary, we look forward to honoring our 100th Leopold Conservation Award recipient. The outstanding land stewardship of these award recipients provides the nutritious food, clean water, wildlife habitat and open spaces we all depend on - truly something worth celebrating.

Sincerely,

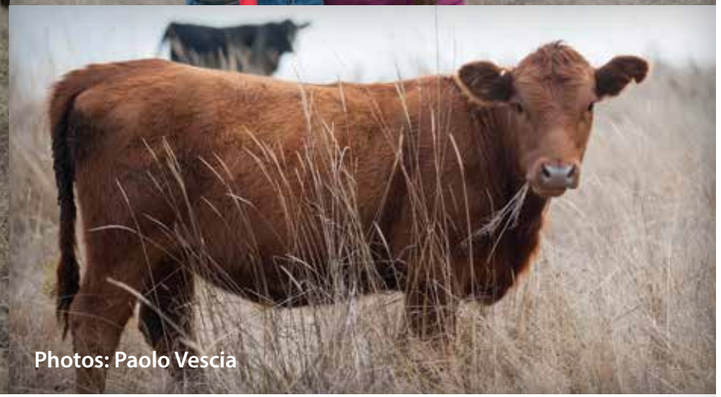
Brent M. Haglund, Ph.D.
*Executive Chairman*



Photo: Paolo Vescia

# CALIFORNIA

# Lone Star Ranch



Photos: Paolo Vescia

Presented in partnership with

Sustainable Conservation

California Farm Bureau Federation

Farm Credit West



**Over 15 years, the Moores and other families have made improvements on more than 400 miles of ranch roads, reducing enough erosion to fill more than 16,000 dump trucks.**

Located near Eureka in Humboldt County, the 5,000-acre, fifth generation **Lone Star Ranch** is a shining example of diversity and environmental stewardship. The ranch is owned by **Mark and Dina Moore**, who are both strong believers in voluntary conservation practices, often striving to exceed the minimum regulatory obligations to improve and sustain natural resources, wildlife and ecosystems. Their mission is to "leave a legacy of stewardship and long term financial security to the ranch and their children".

The rangeland is managed using a rotational grazing program that considers the movement of cattle to balance the livestock management goals, grass growth and the nutritional needs of the cattle. In the mid nineteen eighties, the Moores began calving based on the seasonality of the natural environment, using the energy from the sun to grow grass and harvest it with livestock. Moving the calving season improved reproductive efficiency and coincided with the spring grass growth and the time when the cattle have the highest nutritional needs.

Wildlife habitat is abundant throughout the ranch. Black-tailed deer, black bear, mountain lions and foxes are frequent visitors. The ranch also has multiple watercourses, including Ellison Creek, Star Creek and Grouse Creek, all of which are tributaries to the North Fork of Yager Creek.

The Moores voluntarily acquired a Non-Industrial Timber Management Plan, which provides regulatory assurances to the landowner in exchange for ensuring that timber is harvested in a sustainable manner and commits to an uneven aged management of their forests. The Moores plant approximately five trees for every one harvested – ranging from 3,000 to 5,000 seedlings each winter. Their latest project will restore approximately 150 acres of native black and white oak stands in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Dina currently leads a local watershed group, the Yager/Van Duzen Environmental Stewards (YES) with her ranching neighbors. The group collaborated with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency during development of the Total Maximum Daily Load for sediment impairment of the Van Duzen, allowing EPA to conduct assessments on 80,000 acres of privately owned ranches. Over 15 years, the Moores and other YES families have made improvements on more than 400 miles of ranch roads, reducing enough erosion to fill more than 16,000 dump trucks.

"Lone Star Ranch continues to provide an example of environmental excellence and economic sustainability for other ranchers in their region and throughout the West," said Daniel Macon, UC Davis Rangelands, Department of Plant Sciences. "They successfully balance ecological and production goals in all aspects of their operation." ★

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# COLORADO

# Stacked Lazy 3 Ranch



Photos: Tri-State Generation and Transmission Inc.

Presented in partnership with

Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust · Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association, Inc. A Touchstone Energy Cooperative · American AgCredit Money for Agriculture · Colorado Cattlemen's Association



**Striving to maintain a healthy balance between the wildlife and their business, they leave solar pump watering stations on during the winter for the animals.**

The Tureceks have ranched and farmed on the eastern plains of Colorado since 1910. Over the last 36 years, **Keven and Sandi Turecek** have combined land from both sides of the family to create what is now the **Stacked Lazy 3 Ranch**, a cow/calf and dryland wheat business comprised of 5,000 acres of farmland and 30,000 acres of pasture.

Under the leadership of Keven and Sandi, their land has undergone radical changes from what it was when their predecessors managed it. Mold board plows and tandem disc used to be commonly used tools on the farm, however the lack of moisture on the desert plains where the ranch is located compelled the family to switch to mostly no-till, helping conserve the little rainfall they receive.

For the Tureceks, beef production is secondary to grass production. The family raises an Angus cross cattle, selected for their smaller size and other notable attributes. The smaller cattle eat less grass while still maintaining a good body score. When October arrives, they switch back to rotational grazing and move the cattle to allow the grass to recover until spring. They've also replanted a considerable amount of native grass to conserve topsoil and prevent erosion.

The Tureceks believe the wildlife are as much as part of the ranch ecosystem as the grass and water. It's not uncommon to see golden eagles, bobcats, antelope or even an occasional mountain lion. Striving to maintain a healthy balance between the wildlife and their business, they leave solar pump watering stations on during the winter for the animals.

"Keven is aware that in an industry as climate sensitive as agriculture, the potential threat of climate change takes on an even greater significance…" said Jim Unger, Southwind Insurance Agency. "He knows that practicing conservation tillage, residue and manure management, crop rotation and cover crops all contribute to carbon sequestration while accomplishing sustainable resource management goals." ★

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# KANSAS

# 2S Land & Cattle

Presented in partnership with

Ranchland Trust of Kansas
An affiliate of the Kansas Livestock Association

KACD
Kansas Association of Conservation Districts
Representing Local Conservation Districts



**Within their busy lives, Randy and Nicole have maintained a long-range focus of sharing their conservation passion with others as well as raising their two sons to understand and believe in conservation, stewardship and community.**

Making sound land management decisions on one's own land is done by thousands of landowners and managers every day. But managing one's own land plus the land of fifteen landlords is a feat few successfully juggle. **Randy and Nicole Small** are among the few. The Smalls care for all the land they manage as if it were their own, with the goal of improving upon the foundation laid by previous generations.

**2S Land and Cattle** is a sixth generation cattle ranch and crop farm in the Verdigris River Basin near the southeastern corner of Kansas. The Smalls work alongside their family, including their two young sons who have a budding interest in the family business and have even taken on the responsibility of planting their own crops.

The Smalls have long been considered leaders in relay cropping, which occurs when a second crop is planted into the first crop before harvest. Lespedeza is grown into their wheat crop and sold as seed to other producers, and red clover has been seeded to provide an emergency source of hay during dry years.

Implementing no-till farming practices has allowed the farm to continue to increase the number of acres farmed using the same or a reduced work force. Although it is commonly believed that no-till soils in their area are too cold to produce corn, Randy has developed a system that works well. The Small's corn yields are comparable to or above their neighbor's yields, especially in drought-stressed environments. Rotational grazing occurs in two to three pasture rotations, and their stocking rates are dependent on the quality and type of pasture. The Smalls have purchased and leased several overgrazed pastures over the years, regenerating and building the native grass biodiversity over time with light grazing, patch burning and limited herbicide treatments. These efforts have paid off in productivity, often allowing the pastures to be stocked at heavier rates than neighboring paddocks.

Wildlife thrives on the ranch. The Smalls make a conscious effort to maintain adequate habitat on crop field borders to help sustain wildlife populations. Mowing of roadsides and waterways is timed in such a way to leave adequate cover for wildlife. Quail buffer strips have also been planted in several fields to provide habitat on large field borders.

"Within their busy lives, Randy and Nicole have maintained a long-range focus of sharing their conservation passion with others as well as raising their two sons to understand and believe in conservation, stewardship and community," said David Kraft, State Rangeland Management Specialist for the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service. ★

Leopold Conservation Award®
Presented by Sand County Foundation

# KENTUCKY

# Turner Family Farms

Presented in partnership with



**Mark is a forward thinker and not afraid to adapt new beneficial practices to his farm. I wish more farmers would take Mark's lead in the adaptation of conservation practices, no-till/conservation tillage and cover crops.**

Conservation ethics were instilled in **Mark Turner** at a young age while helping his father on the family farm. When Mark took over **Turner Farms**, he saw the negative effects on the land from the mold board plow, and decided to purchase his first no-till drill in 1983. The farm is now no-till and cover cropped on every acre.

At Turner Farms, Mark works alongside his wife **June**, his son and daughter-in-law **Matthew and Leslie**, and his daughter **Hannah**. The Turners raise chickens for Perdue and grow tobacco, pumpkins, grains and a variety of cover crops. Year-round cover cropping has led to improved soil structure, promoting water infiltration, weed suppression and proper plant growth. Mark also leaves grassy strips along his ditch areas to prevent erosion and nutrient loading into streams.

At Turner Farms, soil testing is a critical piece of the complex soil health puzzle. Before spreading poultry litter, Mark tests the soil and hires a service to scout his fields and provide nutrient maps to see accumulations and trends. To ensure he is being thorough, he sometimes sends the soil to three different labs to help paint a more accurate picture of the soil composition.

His dedication to learning more about the soil and using multiple analysis tools taught him that the land he thought lacked nutrients based on yields was actually his most nutrient-rich. The poor yields were unrelated to fertility, but instead due to water and nutrient management. He has since cut his nitrogen applications by 25%.

The transition to no-till was not without obstacles. The fields had a long history of being used as pasture and developed a thick fescue mat. Mark made mechanical adjustments to his planter to accommodate this aspect of the land. He also spent a considerable amount of time learning new approaches from other no-till farmers.

Mark is active in and has hosted Webster, Ohio and Davies County Field Days. He has traveled across the state to speak and generate interest in soil health, and his efforts have made an impression on his neighbors, sparking their interest in adopting conservation practices.

"Mark is a forward thinker and not afraid to adapt new beneficial practices to his farm. I wish more farmers would take Mark's lead in the adaptation of conservation practices, no-till/conservation tillage and cover crops," said Cary Hicks, McLean County Extension Agent, Ag & Natural Resources Cooperative Extension Service. "He truly is an outstanding leader in this field and in our area." ★

Leopold Conservation Award®
Presented by Sand County Foundation

# NORTH DAKOTA

# Black Leg Ranch

Presented in partnership with



**Leopold stated that in order to practice the science of land health, one must first have a picture of how healthy land maintains itself. Black Leg Ranch, through their holistic approach to managing are providing that picture to future generations.**

In the late 1800s, **Jerry Doan**'s great grandfather, George H. Doan, moved from Canada to homestead in the Dakota Territory. What began as a 160-acre homestead with a sod house has grown into a 17,000-acre farm and ranch. Jerry and his wife Renae own and manage the fourth and fifth generation **Black Leg Ranch**, and their children are poised to take the reins in the coming years.

After Jerry completed his studies in animal science at North Dakota State University, he wanted to learn more about how he could take a holistic management approach to managing the ranch. He attended a holistic management program and became impressed with how methods taught included ways to improve rangeland, natural resources, wildlife and his bottom line. The Doans have since made major strides on the ranch as a result of taking a holistic approach.

The farm contains 700 acres of cover crops consisting of a 20 species mix, and has also been no-till for over 15 years. The cover crop diversity has benefited wildlife, pollinators and has been a cost-effective source for winter grazing.

Some of the biggest goals for the Doans include improving the ecological health and sustainability on the ranch, and diversifying their business. Their infrastructure projects have allowed them to implement an intensive grazing system, mimicking what bison accomplished many years ago – grazing in large numbers while impacting the ground with their hooves, and allowing the grass a long period of rest before returning to graze.

Their grazing system has significantly improved the rangeland, stimulating plant diversity. Very sandy rangeland that was once bare and used for recreational vehicles is now covered with big and little bluestem, purple prairie clover and yellow coneflower. Their holistic techniques have also allowed more plant litter to accumulate on the ground, adding structure and natural fertilizer to the system while keeping the soil cooler and evaporation at a minimum.

The Doans have further diversified their ranch by adding a full service hunting/outfitting business, which has been featured on many national and regional hunting shows and received an award from the governor for having the best tourism package in the state. In the near future, the ranch will also feature a winery.

"Leopold stated that in order to practice the science of land health, one must first have a picture of how healthy land maintains itself. Black Leg Ranch, through their holistic approach to managing are providing that picture to future generations," says Rachel Bush, North Dakota Coordinator for Pheasants Forever. ★

Leopold Conservation Award®
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# NEBRASKA

# Plum Thicket Farms

Presented in partnership with

Nebraska Cattlemen · Cargill · The Nebraska Environmental Trust



**It is not all about making a profit and the Petersons want to leave a legacy of being good stewards of all that is in their care.**

Located on the northern edge of the Nebraska Sandhills is **Plum Thicket Farms**, a diverse crop farm and cattle ranch owned and managed by **Rex and Nancy Peterson**, and their son **Patrick** and his wife **Krista**.

The farm sits atop 2,300 acres of carefully managed pasture and cropland. When the Petersons purchased the property in 1998, they were cautioned about its vulnerabilities to drought and blizzards. The family immediately set out to take important steps to make the pastures drought-resilient, developing water sources, cross fencing to implement a deferred rest rotation grazing system, and planting and fencing windbreaks.

Under Patrick's leadership, the farm was transformed to no-till to prevent erosion and improve water retention, despite knowing the crop yields would initially take a hit. After eleven years, their investment in no-till management is paying off.

Cover crops are an important aspect of the Petersons' commitment to biodiversity. The family uses a multispecies "cocktail" of annual forages for intensive grazing. The mix contributes to the health of the soil, while also providing a nutritional food source for the cattle and pollinator habitat.

The Petersons are committed to improving productivity on their acreage by enhancing the quality and diversity of their ecosystems on pastures and cropland. Their crop rotation includes corn, pinto beans, field peas and wheat. To avoid having to feed their cattle harvested forage, they moved the calving date to May to calve on cereal rye, allowing their cattle cycle to align with the nutrition provided in the forage cycle. Rather than bailing their sorghum, the cattle graze it in the swathes during winter.

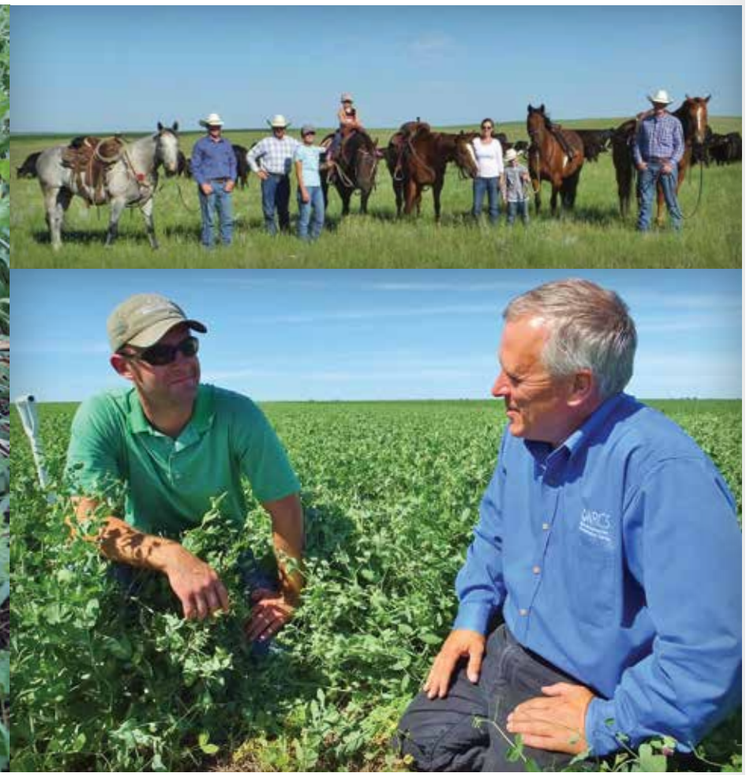
One of the biggest testaments to the resilience of their land occurred during the 2012 drought, the worst in the last 25 years. After a recently rented pasture holding a third of their herd was depleted early, the Petersons successfully weaned 60 to 90-day old calves and significantly culled the herd to reduce pasture use. By late summer, when others had run out of grass, the Petersons had not.

"The Petersons want to inspire other producers to think about the end results of land management practices they pursue," said David George, Rangeland Management Specialist, USDA NRCS. "It is not all about making a profit and the Petersons want to leave a legacy of being good stewards of all that is in their care." ★

Leopold Conservation Award® Presented by Sand County Foundation

# SOUTH DAKOTA

# Cronin Farms, Inc.



Presented in partnership with

South Dakota Cattlemen's Association

South Dakota Grassland Coalition



**They are an invaluable resource to have, well respected in the community, willing to give their time to promote conservation and educate any who will listen.**

**Cronin Farms** was established in 1910, when Carl Cronin moved from Nebraska to South Dakota. Ever since the beginning, the farm has been a diverse mixed livestock and crop enterprise. Today the farm is managed by **Monty and Mike Cronin**, along with their agronomy manager **Dan Forgey**.

The Cronins and Forgey take a holistic approach to crop and livestock management. The farm was transitioned to no-till in 1993, and the fragile perennial pastures were transformed from season-long grazing to a rotational grazing system. Forage and cover crops have been integrated into the diverse crop rotations and are either swath or bale grazed during the fall and winter, improving nutrient cycling, soil health and biological activity. In the spring and summer, the cattle graze grassland along the Missouri River breaks.

Innovation has been critical to the success at Cronin Farms. The most visible result to those passing by the farm is the health of the fields resulting from rotation schemes and grazing systems. However, less perceptible changes include the use of imagery, zone mapping and sampling, variable rate applications and integrated pest management techniques. On the livestock side, the Cronins have adapted their genetic techniques to help produce an animal better suited for a diet high in forage.

A sizable portion of Cronin Farms is adjacent to the Oahe Reservoir on the Missouri River, attracting a large and diverse wildlife population to the property. In the area between farmland and reservoir waterways, the Cronins planted perennial grasses and forbs. They also defer using nearly 40 acres of land used by ground nesting birds during critical nesting periods.

The Cronins are always willing to allow researchers, South Dakota State University Extension and USDA-ARS personnel to perform research on their property and share their techniques with others. Forgey has made presentations about the farm's techniques throughout South Dakota and beyond the U.S. The farm has also hosted agriculture leaders from across the world who want to learn about how the Cronins and Forgey maintain their outstanding soil health and plant performance.

"I was extremely fortunate to have a producer such as Cronin Farms and Dan Forgey located in my county," said Trevis Olson, District Conservationist at NRCS. "They are an invaluable resource to have, well respected in the community, willing to give their time to promote conservation and educate any who will listen." ★

Leopold Conservation Award® Presented by Sand County Foundation

# TEXAS

# Blue Mountain Peak Ranch


Photos: Texas Parks & Wildlife

Presented in partnership with

TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE



Education is an important aspect of the ranch. The ranch has served as a study site for multiple graduate level projects by Texas Tech on the effects of prescribed burning and for species such as the Texas horned lizard.

**Blue Mountain Peak Ranch** was once in a state of disrepair; its poor range health was a result of overgrazing. The land was heavily dominated by blueberry juniper. When it was purchased by **Richard Taylor** and his late-wife Sally in 2001, it was their dream to rehabilitate the land to what it was before European settlement–more live oak savannah grassland in the uplands, and a higher density of woody plants restricted mainly to the draws. For the past eight years, Suzie Paris, Richard and Sally's longtime friend and now Richard's partner, has been active in the ranch restoration.

While several years were spent working to clear the juniper and allow the native herbaceous plants to recover, Taylor began applying prescribed fires on segments the ranch every year. With the exception of a 10-acre educational demonstration plot, all of the juniper has been eradicated, bringing back the potential for livestock grazing and the grassland and wildlife benefits that come with proper management.

Both quantity and quality of the ranch flora have thrived under the management of Taylor. Improvements have been made to rainwater catchment and infiltration through increased ground cover, reducing soil runoff and erosion. This has also led to better wildlife habitat for black-capped vireos, Texas horned lizards and spot-tailed earless lizards.

With assistance from the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, the ranch undergoes an annual deer survey for harvest recommendations and has made significant improvements in buck quality and herd age structure. To control the feral hog population, feeders are used to help attract the hogs, which have been captured by the hundreds over the years.

Education is an important aspect of the ranch. The ranch has served as a study site for multiple graduate level projects by Texas Tech on the effects of prescribed burning and for species such as the Texas horned lizard. Beyond the ranch, Richard and Sally co-founded The Conservation Agency, a scientific, non-profit dedicated to the conservation of natural biodiversity.

"The interesting aspect of the Taylor's management style is that they didn't come in here to see what the land could do for them," says Matt Kast, USDA NRCS Natural Resource Manager. "But rather they wanted to see what they could do to help the land. It's been kind of a ranch remodeling project, from the ground up, and the results have been very impressive." ★

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# UTAH

# Jerrold Richins Ranch

Presented in partnership with

Utah Farm Bureau Federation

Western AgCredit

Utah Cattlemen's Association



**Neighbors, government agency representatives, and tour groups are frequent guests on the ranch to learn about Jerrold's management practices.**

In the early 1990s, the Chalk Creek Watershed was considered one of Utah's most degraded watersheds. The creek suffered through years of erosion-induced silt from hundreds of miles of backcountry mining and oil exploration roads. When the area experienced rain and record floods in 1983, the creek was in ruins. To slow channelization, some residents in the area simply began rolling old car bodies into the creek.

If Chalk Creek could tell its story, **Jerrold Richins** would be credited as a critical player in its restoration. A sheep rancher for most of his life, Jerrold spent considerable time and effort early on trying to keep erosion from the creek's high flow in check. After realizing his efforts were not producing the results he wanted, he decided to make some changes.

Jerrold was the first landowner to begin working with partners to install erosion control structures along sections of the creek on his land, as well as fencing off his livestock. At the time, nearly every other landowner in the area rejected the idea of trying such measures to save the creek, but Jerrold's participation catalyzed many landowners to follow suit after they saw the benefits on Jerrold's land.

The stream conservation efforts directly contributed to restoring the natural bend and habitat suitability of the stream. Chalk Creek is home to one of the few remaining, intact pure-strain Bonneville Cutthroat Trout populations, and the improvements Jerrold championed over the years have had lasting effects on the success of this critical population.

Beyond his work on the creek, Jerrold implemented an efficient, automated pivot irrigation system, reducing use of expensive fuel. The system applies water where and when the crop needs it, and does not wash away fertilizers and nutrients deposited by the grazing livestock. It also allowed him to reduce water use and improve habitat for sensitive, migratory fish species.

Jerrold's ranch has become a living laboratory open to those who want to learn more about how the banks of Chalk Creek are healing. Neighbors, government agency representatives, and tour groups are frequent guests on the ranch to learn about Jerrold's management practices. His willingness to reach out to other watershed groups has aided the development of many other successful watershed partnerships.

"Jerrold's land is a showcase of excellent resource management," said Shane Green, NRCS State Rangeland Management Specialist. "It is the embodiment of a productive working landscape in harmony with a high quality environment. The demonstration of successes in water quality improvements coming from another fellow ranch is a powerful influence." ★

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# WISCONSIN

# Brooks Farms

Presented in partnership with

Farm Bureau Foundation · Land + Water · Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board · Wisconsin Dairy Producers



**Ron and his daughters attend career days at high schools and middle schools to encourage children to consider a career in agriculture.**

When Luther West acquired his 160-acre homestead in 1855, he was required to clear at least 5 acres and build a claim shanty. However, in less than three years, he cleared nearly 80 acres and built a large home on what is now **Brooks Farms**. Luther's spirit of going above and beyond what is required remains a driving force for **Ron Brooks** and his daughters **Alyssa, Kelsey, Zoey and Sydney**, who each strive to conserve, improve and in some cases restore the same land Luther tamed over 160 years ago.

Brooks Farms is a 1,600-acre, vertically integrated dairy and crop farm in Waupaca. The dairy is currently undergoing a significant expansion, from 250 cows to 650, with plans to expand more in the future. The herd expansion will allow the Brooks family to better care for their animals and take advantage of economy of scale, giving them the ability to invest in manure separation and a wastewater treatment plant.

Depending on the year and weather conditions, 70-80% of the cropland is no-till. The cropland undergoes a 10-year crop rotation between oats, alfalfa, corn, soybeans and wheat. Throughout the 10-year rotation, the fields are only tilled twice with heavy consideration of slope and erosion potential. Earthworms thrive in their reduced tillage fields, indicating a diverse healthy soil biosphere and creating channels to allow water infiltration.

The family works with agronomists to develop 2.5-acre grid sections across their land. The small grid section size allows for fine tuning how much fertilizer to apply to virtually every square foot of land. This provides a precise mechanism for fertilizer and seed inputs.

Over the last five years, the Brooks family has dedicated significant time, money and effort towards a large prairie and pollinator project. The project began with invasive plant removal and an effective prairie burn. In the spring of 2016, the Brooks family planted an impressively diverse seed mix, featuring 11 native grass species and more than 30 different forbs and legumes. The site will provide significant cover for ground-nesting birds and pollinator habitat.

The Brooks family rarely turns down an opportunity to reach out to the community to educate others about conservation and stewardship. Ron and his daughters attend career days at high schools and middle schools to encourage children to consider a career in agriculture. Zoey also served as Wisconsin's "Alice in Dairyland", dedicating a year to promoting dairy and agriculture to thousands of students and adults in Wisconsin and beyond.

"The success of the farm has come from the passion that Ron exudes for the symbiotic relationship between his dairy/crop operation and the land. Ron has said many times, 'leave a legacy, not a liability'. He truly believes that saying, and lives by it," stated James Dietzler, Pheasants Forever.

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# WYOMING

# SR Cattle Company


Presented in partnership with

SGA



**The Kane family is an excellent example of land stewardship and conservation on a working family ranch.**

In 1882, the **Kane** family patriarch, Philip Kane, staked his claim to 320 acres at the base of the Big Horn Mountains along Big Goose Creek. The ranch has undergone a lot of changes over the years, growing to 30,320 acres and running about 1100 cows and 240 yearling replacement heifers. The fourth generation ranch is currently owned and managed by **David** and his wife **Terri**, and will be shepherded into the fifth generation by their son **Nate**.

"Take care of the land and it will take care of you" has become the family's ranching philosophy. David's father and grandfather deeply believed in leaving the land in better shape than where it started, and David has passed down that ethic to his children.

Prior to the Kanes' development of water pipelines, many areas of the ranch were unusable due to the lack of water. The Kanes have installed miles of pipeline throughout the ranch, allowing for more even cattle grazing in the pastures and providing a supplemental source of water for wildlife. Initially powered by gas, the water well pumps on the ranch have been converted to solar, significantly reducing the costs of fuel and maintenance.

Many of the Kanes' management practices have been targeted towards improving forage production. In the early nineties, Kanes switched from using chemicals to controlled burns to improve the rangeland. Coupling this with the water developments, a significant increase in forage production and residual on the land has benefited the livestock and wildlife. The ranch now hosts several notable species of wildlife such as trophy mule deer, elk, sharp-tail grouse, Hungarian partridge and pronghorn antelope.

Leafy spurge was once a problem on the ranch, however David implemented a flea beetle program to combat the weed. He has managed the problem by establishing insectary sites and flea beetle populations for collection and distribution. Since leafy spurge is a common problem in the area, David has encouraged his neighbors to begin their own flea beetle programs to combat the damaging plant.

"The Kane family is an excellent example of land stewardship and conservation on a working family ranch," said Andrew Cassiday, NRCS District Conservationist, Sheridan County. "The management of their cattle business demonstrates that a family ranch can achieve high end conservation benefits through superior grazing management and infrastructure improvements, thus ensuring productive landscapes and abundant wildlife."

Leopold Conservation Award®
Presented by Sand County Foundation

## The 2016 Leopold Conservation Award was made possible through the generous support of:

### CALIFORNIA

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Environmental Defense Fund

The Nature Conservancy

### COLORADO

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Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association Inc.

USDA NRCS Colorado

The Bird Conservancy of the Rockies

Mr. Michael Dowling

### KANSAS

Ducks Unlimited

ITC Great Plains

Westar Energy

Clean Line Energy Partners

Kansas Department of Agriculture, Division of Conservation

Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks

Kansas Forest Service

USDA NRCS Kansas

### KENTUCKY

USDA NRCS Kentucky

Brereton and Elizabeth Jones Charitable Family Foundation

Farm Credit Mid-America

Kentucky Assocation of Conservation Districts

Kentucky Corn Growers Association

Kentucky Department of Agriculture

Kentucky Farm Bureau

Kentucky Tree Farm Committee

Kentucky Woodland Owners Association

University of Kentucky

### NEBRASKA

Cargill

Nebraska Environmental Trust

The Nature Conservancy

Nebraska Cattlemen Research and Education Foundation

Rainwater Basin Joint Venture

Sandhills Task Force

Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association Inc.

World Wildlife Fund – Northern Great Plains

### NORTH DAKOTA

Starion Financial

North Dakota Game & Fish Department

APEX Clean Energy

Audubon

Basin Electric Power Cooperative

Cowchip Ranch

Dakota Community Bank and Trust

Delta Waterfowl

Ducks Unlimited North Dakota

KEM Electric Cooperative

The Nature Conservancy

North Dakota Department of Health

North Dakota Natural Resources Trust

North Dakota State University Foundation

Roughrider Electric Cooperative

Slope Electric Cooperative

The Wildlife Society North Dakota

World Wildlife Fund

### SOUTH DAKOTA

South Dakota Cattlemen Association

South Dakota Grassland Coalition

First Dakota National Bank

South Dakota Department of Agriculture

South Dakota Farm Bureau Federation

South Dakota Game, Fish & Parks

South Dakota State University

College of Agriculture and Biological Sciences

South Dakota DENR Discovery Center

USDA NRCS South Dakota

Bad River Ranches

Belle Fourche River Watershed Partnership

Daybreak Ranch

Ducks Unlimited South Dakota

Millborn Seeds

Professional Alliance

South Dakota's Conservation Districts

The Nature Conservancy

South Dakota Pheasants Forever

Todd Mortenson

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – Partners for Fish and Wildlife

### TEXAS

Lee and Ramona Bass Foundation

Texas Parks & Wildlife

### UTAH

Western AgCredit

The Nature Conservancy

Producers Livestock Marketing Association

Utah Farm Bureau Federation

Utah Wool Growers Association

Utah Department of Agriculture

### WISCONSIN

Badgerland Financial

Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board

Alliant Energy Foundation

American Transmission Company

We Energies Foundation

Wisconsin Land and Water

USDA NRCS Wisconsin

### WYOMING

Monaghan Management

Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association Inc.

World Wildlife Fund – Northern Great Plains

Rocky Mountain Power

# Past Recipients

## ★CALIFORNIA

2015
PRATHER RANCH
Jim and Mary Rickert

2014
FULL BELLY FARM
Andrew Brait, Paul Muller, Judith Redmond and Dru Rivers

2013
GIACOMINI DAIRY
Bob, Karen, Diana, Lynn and Jill Giacomini

2012
GIACOMAZZI DAIRY
Dino and Julie Giacomazzi

2011
KOOPMANN RANCH
Tim Koopmann

2010
MONTNA FARMS
Al Montna

2009
RED ROCK RANCH
John Diener

2008
THREE CREEKS RANCH
Chet Vogt

2007
SIERRA ORCHARDS
Craig and Julie McNamara

2006
LANGETWINS WINE ESTATES
Brad and Randy Lange

## ★COLORADO

2015
FLYING DIAMOND RANCH
Johnson Family

2014
TURKEY CREEK RANCH
Walker Family

2013
VISINTAINER SHEEP CO.
Dean and Gary Visintainer

2012
WINEINGER-DAVIS RANCH
Russell and Tricia Davis

2011
PIPE SPRINGS RANCH
McEndree Family

2010
STANKO RANCH
Jim and Jo Stanko

2009
MESA DE MAYA RANCH
John and Carolyn Doherty

2008
COLEMAN RANCH
Jim, Frances, Tim and Teddi Coleman

2007
SAN ISABEL RANCH
Mike and Sara Shields, Bet Kettle

2006
BOHART RANCH
Dick and Sandra Tanner

2005
MCNEIL RANCH
Mike and Cathy McNeil

2004
RUSK HEREFORD RANCH
Randy and Claricy Rusk

2003
CAPPS RANCH
Frankie and Sue Menegatti

## ★KANSAS

2015
SPROUL RANCH
Sproul Family

## ★KENTUCKY

2015
WEST WIND FARM
Charlie Williams

2014
SPRINGHILL FARMS
Peery Family

2013
SHERWOOD ACRES FARMS
Jon & Sylvia Bednarski

## ★NEBRASKA

2015
SHAW FAMILY FARMS
Shaw Family

2014
PELSTER ANGUS RANCH
Pelster Family

2013
BEEL RANCH
Beel Family

2012
SHOVEL DOT RANCH
Buell Family

2011
RGM CORPORATION
Mathewson Family

2010
KALKOWSKI FAMILY RANCHES
Kalkowski Family

2009
BLUESTEM VALLEY FARMS
Lyle and Alice Sittler, Kristen and Todd Eggerling

2008
CALF CREEK AND 4-O RANCHES
A.B.Cox

2007
CHRISTEN RANCH
Rod and Amy Christen

2006
WILSON RANCH
Blaine and Bryan Wilson

## ★SOUTH DAKOTA

2015
JORGENSEN LAND AND CATTLE PARTNERSHIP
Jorgensen Family

2014
ROCK HILLS RANCH
Perman Family

2013
GUPTILL ANGUS
Guptill Family

2012
KOPRIVA ANGUS
Kopriva Family

2011
MORTENSON RANCH
Mortenson Family

2010
DOUD RANCH
Rick and Marlis Doud

## ★TEXAS

2015
THE BIGWOODS ON THE TRINITY
Dr. Robert McFarlane

2014
WINSTON 8 RANCH
Winston Family

2013
BUCKHOLLOW AND STOCKARD-SIRIANNI RANCHES
Jack and Jan Cato

2012
COOK'S BRANCH CONSERVANCY
Mitchell Family

2011
TEMPLE RANCH
Buddy & Ellen Temple

2010
ANDERSON RANCH
Jim Bill Anderson

2009
SELAH, BAMBERGER RANCH PRESERVE
J. David Bamberger

2008
LLANO SPRINGS RANCH
Vandivier Family

2007
77 RANCH
Gary and Sue Price

2006
TREADWELL BRADY RANCH
John and Brian Treadwell

2005
RICHARDS RANCH
John and Brent Hackley

## ★UTAH

2015
W.F. GORING & SON, INC.
Goring Family

2014
JOHNSON MOUNTAIN RANCH LLC
Johnson Family

2013
H.A. FARMS
Stowell Family

2012
HEATON LIVESTOCK COMPANY
Heaton Family

2011
RED PINE LAND AND LIVESTOCK
Osguthorpe Family

2010
DELLA RANCHES
Tanner Family

2009
TAVAPUTS RANCH
Butch and Jeanie Jensen

2008
JOHNSON RANCH
Darrell and Carol Johnson

2007
HAROLD SELMAN, INC.
Fred and Laura Selman

## ★WISCONSIN

2015
MEUER FARM
Meuer Family

2014
HERRICKS DAIRY FARM
Herricks Family

2013
CATES FAMILY FARM
Dick & Kim Cates

2012
HEBBE FAMILY FARM
Jim & Val Hebbe

2011
BRAGGER FAMILY DAIRY
Joe & Noel Bragger

2011
KOEPKE FARMS INC.
Koepke Family

2008
TERRY PETERS*

2006
GERRY MICH*
* Presented in partnership with the Great Lakes Timber Professionals Association

## ★WYOMING

2015
KING RANCH
Eisele Family

2014
LADDER RANCH
O'Toole Family

2013
PADLOCK RANCH
Wayne and Judy Fahsholtz and the Scott Family

2012
SOMMERS RANCH
Sommers Family

2011
FIELDGROVE RANCH
Ryan & Teresa Fieldgrove

2010
7E RANCH
Ron and Linda Heward

2009
FOY RANCH
Rocky and Nancy Foy

2008
PAPE RANCH
Norm and Barbara Pape

2007
GOLDEN WILLOW RANCH
Paul and Catherine Kukowski

2006
BARLOW LIVESTOCK, INC.
Glenn and Joy Barlow