
LEOPOLD
CONSERVATION
AWARD®
PRESENTED BY SAND COUNTY FOUNDATION
2018
YEAR IN REVIEW

Cover: North Dakota Leopold Conservation Award recipients: The Wilson Family

LEOPOLD CONSERVATION AWARD®

PRESENTED BY SAND COUNTY FOUNDATION

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

In his book, *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 recognizes farmers, ranchers, foresters and other landowners committed to improving natural resources while they produce food and fiber.

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

The award makes an impact by publicly recognizing extraordinary achievement in voluntary conservation, inspiring 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 of creating a successful business while managing natural resources 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 and contact Lance Irving at 608.663.4605 x:27 or Lirving@sandcountyfoundation.org

"The Leopold Conservation Award is not just a plaque that you hang on the wall. It is accepting the responsibility to continue to spread the word, and share the things that you've learned over the years. Share the knowledge, the successes and the failures."

Dear Friends,

The quote above from Gary Cammack, one of our 2018 Leopold Conservation Award recipients, captures the land ethic concept that Aldo Leopold wrote about in *A Sand County Almanac.*

A land ethic is the deeply held belief that guides the daily actions of farmers, ranchers and foresters to do the right thing for land health.

Each award recipient's land ethic is evident in the health of the soil, water and wildlife on their land, but also in the vibrancy and profitability of their business. The stories in this Year in Review reflect that cycle of mutual benefits.

Many of the farmers and ranchers we interact with are quick to say it was simple necessity that drove them to adopt practical, common-sense conservation actions. They don't seek the spotlight and don't want to be viewed as an outlier. Instead, they want to be seen as part of a movement by America's farmers and ranchers to strengthen soil health, improve water quality and benefit wildlife.

Or as Gary Cammack aptly puts it, "leaving it better than they found it."

This balancing act of simultaneously achieving economic and environmental success is what Sand County Foundation has been about for more than 50 years. The growing Leopold Conservation Award Program continues to be our most effective vehicle for conveying that message. Last year we expanded the program's reach eastward to Pennsylvania. 2019 will bring more new states into the fold.

Your support will deepen the impact of the award program in existing states and fund its expansion. Please join this movement by nominating a deserving family in your state, providing financial support, and sharing these stories with others.

Thank you,

Kevin McAleese
President and CEO
Sand County Foundation

Photo by Mitch Kezar

CALIFORNIA

Lundberg Family Farms
Richvale, California

Photos by Paolo Vescia

Watch video of Lundberg Family Farms

Presented in Partnership with

Sustainable Conservation

California Farm Bureau Federation

"We see the ground, the land, the soil as a living organism. It's something that needs to be cared for."

– Jessica Lundberg

The Lundberg family's commitment to agricultural conservation can be traced back to the ravages of the Dust Bowl.

When Albert and Frances Lundberg moved from Nebraska to California's fertile Sacramento Valley to grow rice in 1937, they did not forget the short-sighted farming techniques and poor soil management they saw along the way. They impressed upon their four sons the importance of respecting the delicate balance of nature and promoting soil health with crop rotations and cover cropping.

As a result, they began to grow rice in an unconventional way. By the 1960s, the Lundberg brothers saw the need to become their own processor, and sell their rice directly to consumers. Today, the third and fourth generations of Lundbergs embrace the family's conservation heritage of using agricultural practices to protect soil, air, and water.

The family has pioneered stewardship practices such as flooding fields rather than burning them to break down rice straw after harvest. Since the 1960s, the Lundbergs have found this practice builds soil organic matter while improving air quality. By working with university researchers, they have helped inform fellow growers of this practice, particularly after the burning of rice straw was limited by law.

Not burning the rice straw and planting cover crops also provides habitat for millions of migrating waterfowl to rest, feed and rear their young each winter.

Since the 1980s, the Lundbergs have rescued duck eggs ahead of the rice harvest. In partnership with wildlife conservation groups, the eggs are collected, the ducklings are raised in hatcheries, banded with California Department of Fish and Game tags, and released back into safe habitats. These efforts have saved more than 30,000 ducks.

Lundberg Family Farms demonstrates its stewardship in other ways as well. The family received a platinum-level certification from the U.S. Zero Waste Business Council for diverting the majority of their agricultural waste from landfills. In addition, energy needs for farm and processing facilities come from solar power generated on the farm, or are purchased from renewable sources.

The Lundbergs' work to encourage water conservation, rotate crops, grow cover crops, and use natural methods for pest control, have made them a leader in organic rice production and wildlife-friendly farming. These techniques are shared with others through farm tours.

Leopold Conservation Award®
Presented by Sand County Foundation

COLORADO

Beatty Canyon Ranch
Kim, Colorado

Photos by Russ Schnitzer

Watch video of Beatty Canyon Ranch

Presented in Partnership with

COLORADO CATTLEMEN'S ASSOCIATION *Advancing the Legacy*

COLORADO CATTLEMEN'S AGRICULTURAL LAND TRUST

TRI-STATE Generation and Transmission Association, Inc. A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

"Humans can't eat this grass. There's no way we can feed starving people off of this grass, but we can run cattle across it. So we upcycle a non-edible product (and it) becomes a high quality, high nutritional product with beef."

– Steve Wooten,
2018 Leopold Conservation Award recipient

Beatty Canyon Ranch shines at doing right by the land, water, livestock and wildlife amid the grandeur of southeastern Colorado's canyon landscape.

Steve and Joy Wooten, along with their daughter and son-in-law, Arin and Brady Burnham, and daughter and son-in-law, Niki and Rusty Henard, produce high quality beef by grazing a herd of Red Angus cattle through numerous pastures that divide the Las Animas County ranch.

The Wooten Family, now in its 5th and 6th generations, frequently opens their home and ranch to tours to advance awareness about modern ranching and farming practices, and share their focus on being outstanding land stewards. Each member of the family is an industry spokesperson on topics such as grazing practices, treatment for invasive species, beef production issues, wildlife and natural resource management, and family finance and succession plans.

Steve and Joy completed a conservation easement that helped the Beatty Canyon Ranch plan for the future and ensure that the next generation had a place to return to.

The family has taken steps to combat an explosion and spread of Pinyon and Juniper trees on soils better suited for a native grassland ecosystem. For decades, the Wootens added windmills and stock ponds, worked with the Natural Resources Conservation Service to install solar and submersible pumps.

Miles of pipeline now provide water to tanks distributed throughout the ranch. Each tank is equipped with animal escape devices to prevent wildlife death or injury.

A hunting enterprise has generated additional ranch revenue since 1990. It allows hunting of whitetail and mule deer, pronghorn antelope, elk, bighorn sheep, quail, bear, mountain lion and other predators.

The Wootens later created the Purgatoire Wildlife Ranch, LLC with two other ranch families to improve hunting throughout the region. Fifteen families with high conservation values were invited to join the effort that allows selected state residents to hunt on large swaths of private ranchland.

This arrangement has produced a significant financial impact to the community. It also provides an opportunity to share the importance of agriculture's role in short grass prairie ecosystems of the short grass prairie. Most hunting guests had no previous knowledge of the diversity of Las Animas County's unique landscapes, ecosystems, communities, and wildlife.

Neighbor, friend, and fellow rancher, Grady Grissom noted that "Steve and Joy's land ethic is in their DNA. They are generational ranchers who understand, respect, and honor their heritage while also embracing adaptation and innovation."

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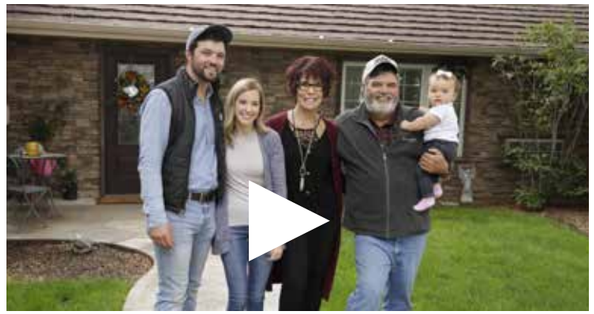
KANSAS

Hoeme Family Farm and Ranch
Scott City, Kansas



Watch video of Hoeme Family Farm and Ranch

Photos by Tucker Boyd and Michael Pearce

Presented in Partnership with

OKACD Kansas Association of Conservation Districts

Ranchland Trust of Kansas
An affiliate of the Kansas Livestock Association

"As farmers and ranchers I believe that we are stewards of this ground that we've been put in charge of. We're stewards of the wildlife, stewards of all the species that depend upon that soil for life."

–Chaston Hoeme,
2018 Leopold Conservation Award recipient

For more than 40 years the Hoeme family has been on the cutting edge of conservation practices that help their farm's profitability, soil health, water quality and wildlife habitat.

Stacy Hoeme and his son, Chaston, farm about 10,000 acres along the Smoky Hill River in western Kansas. For decades the Hoemes have used limited tillage and crop rotation to promote soil health and manage water usage.

Their land ethic involves strategies that far exceed those suggested by state and federal conservation programs.

The Hoemes developed a cattle grazing program that recognizes that prairies require grazing and rest periods to maintain their natural productivity. The diverse collection of plants on their pastures supports some of the largest known populations and densities of the lesser prairie chicken.

Their land was the focal point of the largest study ever conducted on lesser prairie chickens. It was just one way the family has been supportive of research on the rare bird.

The Hoemes also participated in a large research project that sought to learn why the mule deer was in long-term decline. Separately, when biologists from the Brule Sioux Reservation in South Dakota wanted to re-establish swift foxes on tribal lands, they captured, transported and released about 12 swift foxes from the Hoeme's land.

The many insights gained on their land have influenced how government, conservation partners, and other landowners manage the landscape for wildlife.

The Hoemes were among western Kansas' first ranches to fence off ponds to protect water quality and use solar power to pump water for their livestock. They manage many food plots for deer, pheasants, quail and migrating song birds. In times of deep snow, the grain left standing may be their only easily accessed food for miles.

A frequent host for a variety of educational tours, the Hoemes have also stepped into political activism for agriculture and wildlife. Another act of dedication to preserving the fragile, prairie environment found in Kansas is the family's on-going plan to place their ranch in a conservation easement.

Such efforts are the reasons why Stacy has twice been honored as Conservationist of the Year by the Kansas Wildlife Federation. His land ethic is undeniable. Thousands of acres of perfect prairie as designed by Mother Nature exist due to decades of diligence by the Hoeme family.

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KENTUCKY

Trunnell Family Farm
Utica, Kentucky

Photos by USDA-NRCS of Kentucky

Watch video of Trunnell Family Farm

Presented in Partnership with

"Some land had washed, and a thought and doubt was put in my mind. In 20 years if this keeps going like we're going, would there be top soil for anyone to raise a crop? And that's still with me."

–Edward (Myrel) Trunnell,
2018 Leopold Conservation Award recipient

Achieving soil health through the use of no-till farming and cover crops is nothing new to Edward (Myrel) Trunnell, who began farming more than six decades ago. Conservation is synonymous with his idea of farming.

On the no-till scene, Trunnell was an early adopter. He rented a planter from Production Credit Association in 1970 to save soil. He bought his own the next year and never looked back. Today 98 percent of the 1,400 acres he owns, and 500 acres he custom farms is no-tilled.

Not tilling the soil results in less soil compaction, fewer carbon emissions, and requires less machinery which reduces operating costs.

The former tobacco grower even worked with the University of Kentucky to design a no-till tobacco planter. Today he grows corn, wheat, hay, soybeans, pumpkins, fruits and vegetables at Trunnell Family Farm.

Beyond no-till, Trunnell uses cover crops to avoid what he calls 'liquid soil' that flows to creeks during large rain events. Cover crops help build up organic matter in soil, feed microorganisms, break up compaction, scavenge nutrients for future crops, shade out weeds, and provide food for wildlife.

A rotation of crops breaks disease and pest cycles, and a soybean-to-corn rotation reduces his costs and need for nitrogen application.

The cost of farming has also been reduced by the use of soil testing and precision farming technology. Trunnell believes that crops can be produced more efficiently, natural resources can be preserved, and the environment can be protected using agriculture's technological advances.

After his son Kevin joined the farm business in 1990, the family diversified the farm by growing fruits and vegetables. They established Trunnell Farm Market and Fun-Acres, an agritourism business that provides entertainment and educational opportunities to the public.

In addition to grass waterways and border strips, the Trunnells have constructed hundreds of control basins and diversion structures. These actions have provided benefits to soil and water quality. Substantial wooded areas on the farm provide wildlife habitat.

Myrel and Shirley Trunnell live on the same farm that he was born on. His grandfather bought the farm in 1889. Shortly after graduating from high school, Myrel began farming full-time and later bought the farm from his father, Gilbert, in 1978.

A Soil Health Ambassador in Kentucky, Trunnell serves on the Daviess County Conservation District board. He received its Master Conservationist Award and the Kentucky No-till Hero Award in 2007.

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MISSOURI

Scherder Farms
Frankford, Missouri

Photos by Kari Asbury

Watch video of Scherder Farms

Presented in Partnership with

Missouri Farmers Care

Missouri Soybeans

USDA United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service

"The land that we have, there's no way to replace it. You can help it or you can hurt it. I feel it's our responsibility to make it better than what it was when we got it."

–John Scherder,
2018 Leopold Conservation Award recipient

John and Sandy Scherder farm in the Peno Creek watershed. It's a special place where fresh water pours from natural springs in caves nestled on picturesque bluffs. The Scherders are driven by a passion to ensure their farmland and natural surroundings coexist today, and thrive for future generations.

"In my 20 years in the conservation field, I have not met a producer more dedicated to conservation," said Chris Williamson of the Missouri Department of Conservation.

John Scherder grew up a farm kid and earned an animal husbandry degree. He returned to his hometown to farm with Sandy's father. John and Sandy acquired more land after taking over her family's farm. Today they farm with their daughter, Holly, and son-in-law, Curtis, growing corn, soybeans, wheat and hay, and raising a herd of 225 beef cattle.

The Scherders work with local, state and federal agencies to implement conservation practices that preserve and create wildlife habitat, and promote the soil's health and productivity while reducing erosion.

One practice that achieves all of these goals is planting cover crops to complement their corn, soybean and wheat production. Cover crops like cereal rye, crimson clover, oats, millet and tillage radish, work double duty as a conservation tool and as feed for their cattle (either grazed or baled). The Scherder's innovation when it comes to cover crop mixes, seeding methods, and crop rotations have been the focus of farm tours hosted with the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Other conservation practices include constructing grass waterways, terraces, and sediment basin structures. A field's soil and location determine whether no-till, minimal or precision tillage practices are used.

To raise their cattle, the Scherders established a rotational grazing paddock system. In addition to fencing off streams and ponds from the cattle, a spring was rehabilitated in cooperation with the Missouri Department of Conservation to improve fish and wildlife habitat. Their farms feature more than 150 acres of food plots and field borders of native vegetation to attract quail, turkey, deer, pollinator insects and butterflies.

Off the farm, the Scherders have been active in the formation and development of the Peno Creek Partnership. The goal of this farmer-led watershed initiative is to inform other farmers and landowners on the importance of cover crops, rotational grazing systems, agricultural conservation practices and the ecological importance of the watershed to the Mississippi River. As a result, more than 2,000 additional acres of cover crops were planted by 42 landowners.

John and Sandy represented Missouri in the five-state Watershed Leaders Network developed by the Fishers and Farmers Partnership in 2016.

The Scherders exemplify what a conservation mindset can accomplish on a farm.

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NEBRASKA

RuJoDen Ranch, The O'Rourke Family
Chadron, Nebraska

Photos courtesy of Lora O'Rourke

Watch video of RuJoDen Ranch

Presented in Partnership with

The Nebraska Environmental Trust — preserving NATURAL NEBRASKA™ for future generations

Cargill

I AM A FAN

"When you consider that 50 percent of the Earth's land surface is composed of rangelands, that's a tremendous carbon sink. It's really got to be managed as importantly as our rainforests."

–Jim O'Rourke,
2018 Leopold Conservation Award recipient

Jim O'Rourke's grandparents, Frank and Jerene, became the second family to steward this land along the Pine Ridge south of Chadron in northwestern Nebraska in 1950. A sign they erected, which reads, "O'Rourke - RuJoDen Ranch - Wildlife Habitat," reflects the family's commitment to a land conservation ethic.

Jim and Lora's influences are as much global as local. Lora worked her way from the rangelands of Utah to the Pine Ridge of Nebraska as a professional rangeland management specialist. Jim implemented range projects in Africa before returning home to work as a professor at Chadron State College where he developed the Range Management Program. They share their love and knowledge of natural resources through active educational tours and demonstrations on their ranch.

Previously cultivated fields have been seeded with perennial grasses to stabilize and rebuild soil health.

Grazing management along the riparian areas of Chadron Creek, which bisects the ranch, has resulted in a multi-age class of hardwoods as well as increased tree and shrub diversity, ideal for a variety of wildlife. Stable banks, overhangs and shady, cool water provides for good fish habitat.

Invasive cedar trees were removed from the riparian areas and uplands to further improve wildlife habitat.

The ponderosa pine forest was thinned to improve tree health and reduce fuel loads, which proved effective in saving the majority of the timber stand during a 2012 wildfire.

By experimenting with over 90 species, windbreaks were established that will produce hardwood timber, increase food supplies for wildlife, provide erosion control, and boost plant diversity.

Prescribed burns, implemented to improve rangeland health and increase forage quality for livestock, were conducted with the help of Chadron State College range management students. In many ways the ranch is a natural resource classroom.

The ranch is managed under a short duration, high intensity livestock grazing system with innovative fencing and watering systems that benefit livestock and wildlife. On average, pastures are grazed 10 days per year allowing for improved rangeland health and livestock weight gains.

The O'Rourke family realizes that the increasing number of smaller acreage ranches need to be diversified to be sustainable and have implemented beekeeping, pasture raised poultry, deer and turkey hunting, a horse-motel and an agritourism endeavor. Guests have the opportunity to stay in historic sheep herder wagons and hunt, fish, hike or simply "un-plug" from the modern world.

Through multiple generations, the O'Rourke family continues to carry on a traditional land ethic guided by a wisdom that all systems are connected and must work together to achieve true land conservation.

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NORTH DAKOTA

The Wilson Family Farm
Jamestown, North Dakota

Photos courtesy of the Wilson Family

Watch video of The Wilson Family Farm

Presented in Partnership with

"I've come to the realization that I'm only here temporarily, and the soil has been here long before me and will be here forever. It's perpetual. I can either destroy it, or build it, and I've chosen to build it."

–Jeremy Wilson,
2018 Leopold Conservation Award recipient

Described by some as "pioneers" when it comes to demonstrating the importance of soil health, Jeremy and Sarah Wilson are showing that conservation can improve a farm's profits while improving the land's productivity.

By mimicking nature with a diverse, regenerative, no-till cropping system, the Wilsons are building soil structure and their farm's resilience to survive changes in weather and commodity markets.

Better soil health means fewer costly inputs are needed to grow crops. For the Wilsons, it also means their customers have a product grown with fewer chemicals, fertilizers and fuel. All of this is gained while maintaining yields and protecting soils that were previously susceptible to wind and water erosion.

Cover crops are tailored for a specific purpose and site. Winter rye is grown to address the soil's salt content, a serious resource concern in North Dakota's glaciated region. Rye also helps cycle and scavenge nutrients, keeping them from leaching away and becoming a pollutant. Other cover crops help break up compacted soil. This allows excessive rain to infiltrate the soil rather than running off. The stored moisture reduces stress on crops during times of drought.

Efforts to seed cover crops by aircraft and modified planters have been noticed and replicated by neighbors. The Wilsons' willingness to collaborate and share what conservation can do for the land has had a positive ripple effect across multiple states. Their long history of working with the Stutsman County Soil Conservation District, includes holding public tours on conservation practices and cropping systems.

Their public outreach has extended to constructing a Heritage Room in their home. Complete with professional grade audio/video equipment, the space allows them to show visitors what happens on their farm throughout the year, and not just on the day of their visit. Business and political leaders, scientists and journalists from around the globe have visited their farm to learn the value of what they are doing.

For more than 20 years, the Wilsons have been outstanding spokespersons and advocates for conservation agriculture. Jeremy was selected as a "Soil Health Champion" by the National Soil Conservation Association of Conservation Districts.

The Wilsons donate three acres of sweet corn annually to the Great Plains Food Bank. That equals more than 27,600 meals of fresh produce to those in need. It's another example of how through conservation practices and stewardship, the Wilsons have provided benefits that go far beyond their farm gate.

Sarah Wilson says every farm is as unique as a thumb print. As the fourth generation of Wilsons to farm this piece of North Dakota, they are certainly making their mark.

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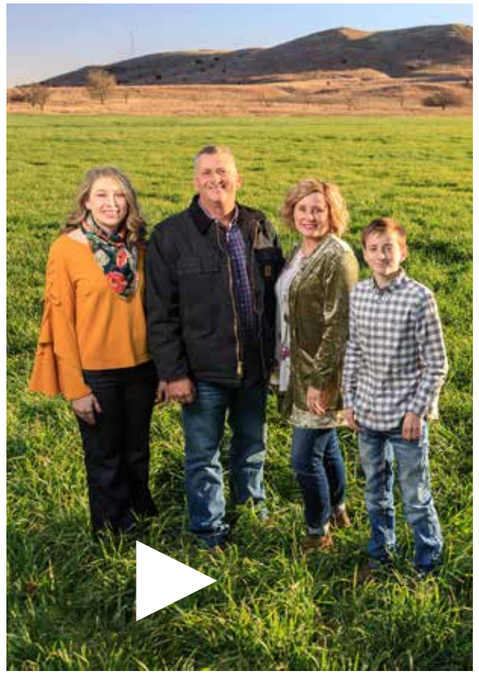
OKLAHOMA

Jackson Farms
Mountain View, Oklahoma



Photos by Dustin Mielke

Watch video of Jackson Farms

Presented in Partnership with

"The cattle love the cover crops. Not only are you feeding your cows well, but you're helping your soil. I really think the future is bright in this part of the country for these grazing cover crops, and cover cropping in general."

–Russ Jackson,
2018 Leopold Conservation Award recipient

As third generation ranchers, Russ and Jani Jackson understand the importance of producing food and fiber in a way that works with nature, not against it.

Their ranch is located on prairie at the base of the Wichita Mountains, in a region known for hot summers, high winds, and increasingly limited, but intense rainfalls. They realized conservation practices were needed on their highly erodible soils to preserve the ranch for the next generation.

The Jacksons began converting their cropland acres to a no-till system about a decade ago. The crop residue on the land provided increased habitat for wildlife. They soon noticed improved soil health, and reduced wind and water erosion. The switch to no-till also reduced their fuel and labor costs.

Developing a conservation plan with the Natural Resources Conservation Service allowed them to access the Environmental Quality Incentive Program. That federal program's positive impacts convinced them to enter the Conservation Stewardship Program in 2011. Its goals included brush management, prescribed grazing plans and planting cover crops.

The Jacksons found that planting canola as a cover crop helped suppress weeds in wheat fields, and it could be planted with equipment they already owned. Wheat yields increased the following year. It was a watershed moment for Russ, who wondered if adding more crop diversity would spur further productivity.

Adding milo, sesame and cowpeas to their rotation of cotton, wheat, corn and soybeans gave their soil year-round nourishment from a variety of root types and nutrients. The soil's organic matter increased dramatically between 2015 and 2017, allowing it to hold more moisture between rains. A nearly constant crop canopy also provides habitat for small animals, insects and pollinators.

The Jackson's diversified ranch was more profitable and better for the natural resources on the land, while requiring less labor. Despite all this progress, they felt something was still missing.

They noted the ranch's landscape was once native prairie that was home to herds of bison. The land benefited when bison intensively grazed an area before moving on and gave the grass a chance to rebound. The Jacksons knew that, when managed properly, cattle can stimulate the same plant growth. Grazing cattle press seeds into the soil with their hooves, and spread their waste on the land as a natural fertilizer. So, last year, they introduced a herd of about 200 beef cattle to graze the ranch's grassland and crop fields. It's the latest example of their efforts to benefit the ecosystem by mimicking its natural processes.

The result is a ranch that is productive, profitable and regenerative.

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PENNSYLVANIA

The DiFebo Family, Harvest Home Farms
Bangor, Pennsylvania

Watch video of The DiFebo Family

Photos courtesy of USDA-NRCS of Pennsylvania

Presented in Partnership with

The Heinz Endowments
Howard Heinz Endowment
Vira I. Heinz Endowment

Pennsylvania Farm Bureau

"We took highly erodible land and put it into pasture, created a lot of biodiversity, better drainage, better soil structure, less runoff."

–Richard DiFebo,
2018 Leopold Conservation Award recipient

A passion for conservation has earned Harvest Home Farms the first Leopold Conservation Award in Pennsylvania.

Richard DiFebo initially saw the former dairy farm as a hobby in the 1990s. If the family farm was to be passed down to his children someday, he knew it was his turn to implement sustainable conservation practices that would benefit its soil and water.

Richard's career in the lawn care business had equipped him with an extensive knowledge of grasses and soil. While researching the health benefits of grass-fed beef, he realized specializing in a niche market would fetch premium prices. Done right, grazing beef cattle would also restore the farm's soil.

Highly-erodible, conventional corn and soybean fields were planted with permanent grasses to provide pasture and reduce erosion. Assistance from Ducks Unlimited fenced off streams and ponds so cattle would not erode the banks. Over time, 175 acres were divided into 70 grazing paddocks. A rotation system would allow for long rest periods between each grazing. Another 130 acres grow hay, and 30 acres grow non-traditional, diverse forages like sorghum, oats and crimson clover.

After graduating from college, Richard's son Dohl returned to the farm as a partner. Together, they established a diverse cropping system with cover crops. Contour strips and grass waterways were installed, and a desolate shale pit was reclaimed so it could support plant growth and eventually be pastured.

Introducing diverse vegetation, rotational grazing and less soil compaction improved the soil's biology and its ability to absorb water. The rejuvenated land could support more cattle without negative environmental impacts.

The USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service assisted with improved fencing and farm lanes. The Department of Energy provided funding for a solar-powered watering system. Preventing cattle from walking to a centralized water tank ensured even distribution of nutrients on the land.

After accepting help for conservation projects on his farm, Richard collaborated with a local school district and the Martin's Jacoby Watershed to share his knowledge with others. He convinced the school district to transform an abandoned tree farm into pasture. The site now features an outdoor classroom that promotes the benefits of grazing and other conservation practices.

The roots of Harvest Home Farms trace back to when Dohl's great-grandfather, Elton Ott, purchased 100 acres in the northeast corner of Northampton County in 1930. Its proximity to New York City was a benefit as Elton's son, Budd, began dairy farming in the 1940s. Today, the DiFebos have created a following for their beef in several states. The farm's website educates consumers on the benefits of grass-fed beef and agricultural conservation.

More than a motto, "healthy soil, clean air and water, healthy cattle, healthy people" appears to be the Harvest Home Farms' pathway to the future.

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SOUTH DAKOTA

Cammack Ranch
Union Center, South Dakota

Photos by Joe Dickie and Mitch Kezar

Watch video of Cammack Ranch

Presented in Partnership with

South Dakota Cattlemen's Association

South Dakota Grassland Coalition

"The Leopold Conservation Award is not just a plaque that you hang on the wall. It is accepting the responsibility to continue to spread the word, and share the things that you've learned over the years. Share the knowledge, the successes and the failures."

–South Dakota State Sen. Gary Cammack,
2018 Leopold Conservation Award recipient

With its commitment to conservation, Cammack Ranch is a place where soil, grass, cattle, wildlife and a family legacy all thrive.

As newlyweds, Gary and Amy Cammack dreamed of owning a ranch. Both natives of the Union Center area, they purchased 320 acres of hay ground in 1978. By 1984 they bought the 927 acres of rangeland in Meade County that would become their 'home place.' Last year's purchase of 1,000 acres in Wyoming grew their ranch to 11,000 acres.

Their land sustains 600 beef cow-calf pairs. Soil health, water infiltration, grass growth and beef production have benefitted from practicing rotational grazing. The Cammacks installed 20 miles of cross-fencing and more than 25 miles of water pipeline to make this work. With an eye on enhancing efficiency, they utilize crossbreeding within their herd and moved their calving season to later in the spring to better match their resources with what Mother Nature provides.

For winter cover on the range, they've constructed v-shaped windbreaks from secondary steel. Each is strategically placed to minimize the herd's traffic over riparian areas. Additional wind protection (and wildlife habitat) is provided by the more than 30,000 trees the Cammacks have planted over three decades.

The Cammacks built their own tree planter with a water jet system to plant willow and cottonwood shoots. Once planted, they fence out the area to protect the tree shoots.

Their other innovations include a bale processor that cuts hay shorter. It's better for cattle consumption and they waste less of it. Long, discarded stems can also kill grass. When harvesting hay, they use a driving pattern that allows wildlife to flush and escape.

"Our belief is that the health of range and the vitality of the wildlife population is a barometer of how well you'll do in the ranching business," said Gary Cammack, a fourth-generation cattle rancher.

"The effects of our conservation efforts, or lack thereof, will be evident 100 years from now," said Gary, who serves as a South Dakota State Senator and chairs the Senate Agriculture Committee. "A person can pass all the regulations you want, but if the conservation ethic is not instilled in the land managers or owners, it isn't going to matter how many regulations you have."

"We believe the term 'environmentalist' has been hijacked from the people involved in agriculture," he added. "No one cares more about the land than the people who live there."

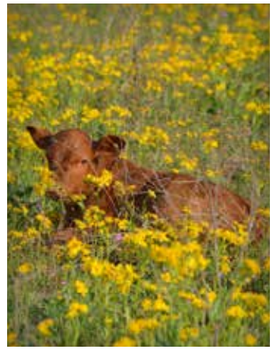
The family has operated Cammack Ranch Supply in Union Center since 1979.

The Cammacks' four grown sons all have varying degrees of ownership in the ranch and cattle. Preliminary estate planning has taken place to ensure the fifth, sixth and succeeding generations of Cammacks are able to continue ranching in South Dakota.

Leopold Conservation Award®
Presented by Sand County Foundation

TEXAS

Laborcitas Creek Ranch
Falfurrias, Texas



Watch video of Laborcitas Creek Ranch

Photos courtesy of Texas Parks & Wildlife

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LONE STAR LAND STEWARD

"We're returning it back as prairie to take care of the doves, quail, deer, turkey and the ducks. We have more wildlife on the ranch now than we've ever had."

–Berdon Lawrence,
2018 Leopold Conservation Award recipient

Wildlife habitat is flourishing in South Texas thanks to Laborcitas Creek Ranch.

Since its 2001 purchase, innovative land and water management techniques at the ranch in Brooks County have improved wildlife habitat, quality and population across its 16,000 acres.

Its owners, Berdon and Rolanette Lawrence, credit the landscape's continuous improvement to the ranch's dedicated team of professionals, and innovative ideas from friends and wildlife consultants. The ranch, which quickly became known for memorable and successful wildlife experiences, qualified for the Texas Leopold Conservation Award by receiving the Lone Star Land Steward Ecoregion Award (representing the South Texas Plains ecoregion) in 2014.

New strategies of managing pastures have allowed native grasses to thrive and provide habitat for quail, turkey and deer.

In addition to selective grazing of cattle in certain areas, the ranch uses a modified pasture aerator called the 'Quailerator.' The unique spiked contraption is pulled behind a tractor in pastures that have become densely matted with perennial grasses. It's designed to simulate grazing and the hoof action of cattle.

Winter disking involves cultivating 15-foot wide strips in a checkerboard fashion (about 100 yards apart) throughout the ranch. It stimulates the weed growth needed to produce the seeds that feed insects that feed many species of birds.

With adequate moisture the ranch land responds favorably to controlled burns every three years.

The Lawrences created 70 ponds that dot the ranch to provide water for wildlife. A combination of solar and electric powered wells, and windmills supply water to ponds, reservoirs and wetlands utilized by migratory birds ranging from ducks to sand hill cranes. The lush green vegetation provides the grasses needed for nesting habitat, even during times of drought.

Eighteen irrigation pivots provide the water that fuels fields of brown top millet, sorghum and china red peas for wildlife to feed on.

Supplemental feeding programs for deer, quail and turkey are conducted. Feeding protein to deer increases bucks' antler development and does' health for fawn development. Elevated turkey feeders are maintained year-round, and a corn and sorghum mix is offered for quail during drought and harsh winter conditions.

A census of deer and quail populations is conducted annually by helicopter. Survey results are used to analyze deer density, buck-to-doe ratios, and the number of quail coveys. Harvest records kept of all birds, deer and predators harvested on the property are used to manage wildlife populations.

The Lawrences teamed up with Caesar Kleberg in 2012 to sponsor the C. Berdon and Rolanette Lawrence Waterfowl Research Endowment. Berdon Lawrence is a founding member of the South Texas Property Rights Association. He is a recipient of the Texas Wildlife Association's Texas Outdoorsman of the Year Award. Ranch manager, David Kelly, is the president of the Brush Country Ground Water Conservation District.

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UTAH

Ercanbrack Livestock
Coalville, Utah

Photos by Ron Francis

Watch video of Ercanbrack Livestock

Presented in Partnership with

Utah Farm Bureau Federation · Western AgCredit · Utah Cattlemen's Association

"We're not just regenerating aspen trees. We're not just regenerating the land, but regenerating the interest in the soil and the water, and also our kids' interest as well."

–Dusty Morgan,
2018 Leopold Conservation Award recipient

Ercanbrack Livestock's story began amid the Great Depression with a hearty handshake and $12 an acre on the front steps of the Summit County Courthouse. Since then, four generations of ranchers have ridden the same trails and shared a passion for the land.

Ed and Dixie Ercanbrack and their adult children, Dane and Dusty, work together at making their land productive by targeting areas in need of water, regeneration and soil support. It's working.

Range management projects have improved the quality of wildlife habitat, pastures for beef cattle, and the ranch's many springs and ponds. By restoring native grasses and the health of the soil, they are reversing damage from decades of sheep grazing and coal mining. Prescribed rotational grazing lowers the threat of wildfire, as native grasses and vegetation are allowed to reseed, producing healthier forests.

Cattle watering facilities have been retrofitted so birds and bats can safely drink. Supplying a clean water supply benefits the performance of livestock and wildlife.

The vegetation, warm coal soils, and cliffs found at a reclaimed coal mine provides unique habitat for wildlife. With an influx of elk, deer, ruffed grouse, mountain lions, bobcats and bear, the 2,400-acre ranch offers limited big game hunting to others.

A Forest Stewardship Plan was developed with the Utah Department of Natural Resources' Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands. It encourages regeneration of aspen tree groves, and eradicates musk and Canadian thistles, and other invasive species.

Conservation of grazing land works hand-in-hand with success in the cattle business. Two generations of Ercanbracks are achieving more profit with fewer cattle, by adopting innovative practices (like a fence-line weaning system) while seeking niche markets for their Angus and Simmental cattle.

The Ercanbracks host youth groups on their ranch, have participated in pro-conservation videos for fellow ranchers and consumers, and advocate for conservation issues to legislators and agricultural organizations.

"Give to the land, it will give back" is more than just a motto for those who live and work at Ercanbrack Livestock.

The family has established a conservation easement on the ranch to continue to protect, maintain and improve these resources for generations to come. This demonstrates their commitment to the land and their agricultural legacy.

Ercanbrack Livestock sets an example of what sustainable resource management looks like.

Leopold Conservation Award® Presented by Sand County Foundation

WISCONSIN

David Geiser, Gold Star Dairy
New Holstein, Wisconsin

Photos by Casey Langan

Watch video of Gold Star Dairy

Presented in Partnership with

"You need to be responsible for what you're doing with the land."

–David Geiser,
2018 Leopold Conservation Award recipient

Some farmers focus on yield and profit. David Geiser is also driven by conservation and education.

A quiet leader, Geiser listens to others and learns about innovative practices before putting them to work at Gold Star Dairy. His reputation as a respected farmer and conservationist stems from his devotion to improve the health of soil, water, plants and cattle.

Geiser is passionate about learning how to best manage the fragile karst topography that his family has farmed between Lake Michigan and Lake Winnebago for more than a century.

Geiser came home to begin dairy farming in 1975. Installing a Natural Resources Conservation Service-approved manure storage facility in the 1980s was a huge undertaking, but the right thing to do. He established a successful rotational grazing system for his 100-cow herd in the 1990s. He witnessed how grazing allowed plants and soil to retain water rather than running off and compromising water quality. He was a founding member of the Calumet County Forage Council and received the Midwest Forage Council's Pacesetter Award.

In 2000 straight line winds destroyed the farm's barns. Like other dairies, Geiser and his wife, Deb Reinhart, had been growing their herd's size to adapt to changes in the dairy economy. Decisions had to be made about the farm's future.

Grazing paddocks gave way to a freestall barn for more than 400 cows, but the acres of grass that surrounded the farmstead remained as a prudent way to minimize runoff and soil erosion. Geiser grows cover crops to feed his cattle and soil. He has hosted outreach and research efforts that examine how water moves through fractured bedrock systems and the unique geological features of karst. Fields with shallow bedrock are identified and carefully managed. Conservation practices adopted include vegetated buffer strips and no-till cultivation practices. Paved ditches and leachate storage areas transport and collect runoff responsibly.

Geiser was one of the first Calumet County farmers to obtain a Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan through the NRCS's Environmental Quality Incentives Program. His conservation practices have been passed on to the farmers that grow Gold Star Dairy's feed. Gold Star Farms received the Calumet County Land Conservation Award in 2004.

Geiser has gone the extra mile to ensure a legacy at Gold Star Farms. His younger business partners and family members are mindful of the conservation enhancements found on their piece of rolling Wisconsin landscape.

Through hard work, perseverance, well-thought out decisions and luck, the farm has survived and thrived under Geiser's leadership. Today on the 106-year-old family farm, Geiser continues to adapt, learn and implement conservation practices that will leave the land as a living legacy for generations to come.

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Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts

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USDA NRCS

Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture

Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts

Center for Dairy Excellence

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South Dakota

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South Dakota Grasslands Coalition

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South Dakota Department of Agriculture

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South Dakota Department of Game, Fish & Parks

South Dakota Farm Bureau Federation

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C. Jeff Thompson

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Lone Star Ranch
Mark and Dina Moore

2015
Prather Ranch
Jim and Mary Rickert

2014
Full Belly Farm
Andrew Brait, Paul Muller, Judith Redmond and Dru Rivers

2013
Point Reyes Farmstead Cheese Co.
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
Lange Twins Wine Estates
Brad and Randy Lange

Colorado

2017
Rancho Largo Cattle Co.
Grady Grissom

2016
Stacked Lazy 3 Ranch
Keven and Sandi Turecek

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, Sandra and Nate Tanner

2005
McNeil Ranch
Mike and Cathy McNeil

2004
Rusk Hereford Ranch
Randy and Claricy Rusk

2003
Capps Ranch
Frankie and Sue Menegatti

Kansas

2017
Lazy VJ Farms
The Vorhees Family

2016
2S Land & Cattle
Randy and Nicole Small

2015
Sproul Ranch
Sproul Family

Kentucky

2017
Tallow Creek Farm
Harry and Karen Pelle

2016
Turner Family Farms
Mark and June Turner

2015
West Wind Farm
Charlie Williams

2014
Springhill Farms
Peery Family

2013
Sherwood Acres Farms
Jon and Sylvia Bednarski

Missouri

2017
Uptown Farms
Matt and Kate Lambert

Nebraska

2017
K & W Farms
Kurt and Wayne Kaup

2016
Plum Thicket Farms
Rex and Nancy Peterson

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 4-0 Ranches
A.B.Cox

2007
Christen Ranch
Rod and Amy Christen

2006
Wilson Ranch
Blaine and Bryan Wilson

North Dakota

2017
Miller Ranch
Ken and Bonnie Miller

2016
Black Leg Ranch
Jerry and Renae Doan

Oklahoma

2017
Emmons Farm
Jimmy and Ginger Emmons

South Dakota

2017
Blue Bell Ranch
Hamann Family

2016
Cronin Farms
Mike and Monty Cronin

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

2017
Dixon Water Foundation
Robert Potts

2016
Blue Mountain Peak Ranch
Richard Taylor

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 and 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

2017
Circle Bar Ranch
Fred Thurston

2016
Jerrold Richins Ranch
Jerrold Richins

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

2017
Brickstead Dairy
Dan Brick and Family

2016
Brooks Farms
Brooks Family

2015
Meuer Farm
Meuer Family

2014
Herricks Dairy Farm
Herricks Family

2013
Cates Family Farm
Dick and Kim Cates

2012
Hebbe Family Farm
Jim and Val Hebbe

2011
Koepke Farms Inc.
Koepke Family

2010
Bragger Family Dairy
Joe and Noel Bragger

2008
Terry Peters
Terry Peters Logging

2006
Gerry Mich

Wyoming

2016
SR Cattle Company
Kane Family

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 and 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

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"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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