



LEOPOLD CONSERVATION AWARD[®]

PRESENTED BY SAND COUNTY FOUNDATION

2021

▶ **Watch the 2021 video.**



2021 NEW MEXICO LEOPOLD CONSERVATION
AWARD RECIPIENT, TUDA LIBBY CREWS

PHOTO BY CHRISTI BODE



It was Aldo Leopold who wrote, “the landscape of any farm is the owner’s portrait of himself”.

In Leopold’s influential book, *A Sand County Almanac*, the renowned conservationist, landowner and scientist called for an ethical relationship between people and the land they own and manage. His idea of a “land ethic” is alive and well today in thousands of American farmers, ranchers and forestland owners who improve soil health, water quality and wildlife habitat while they produce food and fiber.

For more than 50 years, Leopold’s land ethic has guided Sand County Foundation’s work to inspire and empower more landowners to recognize and embrace conservation opportunities on their land. Sand County Foundation launched the Leopold Conservation Award Program nearly 20 years ago in Colorado as a way to publicly celebrate leading land stewards who serve as examples to others.

Today, with dozens of partners and sponsors across the U.S., Sand County Foundation proudly presents the Leopold Conservation Award in 23 states to private landowners who exemplify the spirit of Leopold’s land ethic.

The award program recognizes extraordinary achievement in voluntary conservation, inspires other landowners, and helps the general public understand the vital role private landowners play in conservation success.

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

To learn more, visit www.leopoldconservationaward.org and contact Lance Irving at 608.729.1389, Lirving@sandcountyfoundation.org



Dear Friends,

Sand County Foundation and our partners are proud to share the stories of the land stewards who make up the Leopold Conservation Award Class of 2021.



These award recipients represent a wide swath of American agriculture: beef cattle in the Great Plains, dairies in the Northeast, cornfields in Kansas, a hog farm in Missouri, poultry in Pennsylvania, and a herd of goats from South Dakota.

Their farms and ranches stretch from just a few miles from the Canadian and Mexican borders to places in between, like a farming, fishing and forestry business along the Potomac River in Maryland. Their working land is home to big game, migrating birds, beneficial insect pollinators, and human visitors looking to connect to rural landscapes.

The camaraderie of these innovators was on full display last summer when we gathered Leopold Conservation Award alumni for our national conservation symposium in Colorado. Their efforts as land stewards, and as mentors in our budding program for historically underserved farmers and ranchers, continue to scale up conservation across the nation.

Your support deepens and expands the impact of this award program. 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



CALIFORNIA

MARIE AND GLENN NADER CANBY, CALIFORNIA



▶ Watch video of Marie and Glenn Nader



An inspiring transformation at Witcher Creek Ranch is thanks to Marie and Glenn Nader's willingness to think big and bold.

Marie, Glenn, and their son, Alan, are dedicated to promoting water conservation and soil health on a working cattle ranch. They credit state and federal conservation-focused programs and grants with helping them make dramatic changes on their 2,880 acres of Modoc County.

After buying the ranch in 1999, they developed a plan to work with nature by melding wildlife habitat with resilient grazing pastures. They consulted with several organizations on how to best preserve and improve the ranch's natural resources.

The Naders introduced strategic rotational grazing of their cattle as a tool to improve the ecosystem. Fencing subdivided pastures into small sections for high-intensity, but short duration, grazing, which is timed to optimize weed control and wildlife management.

The ranch's location in northeast California is critically important to migratory birds who depend on wet meadows for stopover habitat. Therefore, wetlands are not grazed during waterfowl nesting season, and enough dry grass is left behind to provide nesting material and cover.

Assistance from the federal Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) helped the Naders create cattle watering sites away from creeks, which reduced erosion, protected water quality and provided wildlife habitat. Three miles of single wire electrified fencing around riparian areas allow deer and antelope to migrate while keeping cattle out of the creek.

Water is the life blood of a cold desert environment. Replacing seven miles of irrigation ditches dug in the 1880s with an efficient system of underground pipelines allowed the Naders to better cope with two major droughts.

In addition to cattle grazing, the ranch's other income stream is hay production. Since transitioning to organic hay production in 2014, the Naders have produced a bountiful crop on nutrient-rich soils without fertilizer. Hay production increased and labor costs decreased after a wheel line irrigation system was replaced with a pivot irrigation and piping system. Increased yield and revenue from organic hay made it easier to give 800 acres of wildlife-rich wetlands a three-year rest from grazing.

Working with nature means that while many landowners tried to get beavers out of their ditches and creeks, the Naders recruited them. Beaver dams are restoring the hydrological function of their creek, while raising the water table of a nearby meadow. The Naders also quantified their land improvements through bird monitoring. Using bird data gave them insight as to which stretches of a two-mile creek restoration needed more attention.

The Naders also opened their stream to wildlife researchers interested in the viability of reintroducing a threatened species of trout. Thermal data loggers collected hourly stream temperature data over a three-year period. Over time it was shown that their conservation practices are making progress in reducing the stream's temperatures. It's just one example of how the Naders have collected data for feedback on the progress of their conservation plans.

Whether it's stream temperature data collection, soil sampling, or forage testing, the Naders consult with a variety of organizations on extensive monitoring programs. Just as restored streambanks and lush meadows would indicate, data provides conclusive evidence that their conservation practices are making an impact.

Finalists

Beretta Family Dairy of Sonoma County

Stemple Creek Ranch of Marin County

Presented in Partnership with



COLORADO

MAY RANCH LAMAR, COLORADO



▶ Watch video of May Ranch



Photos by Sarah Dildricksen, Maggie Hanna, and Amy Johnson

"We understand that our ranch is not just a collection of land, plants, cattle, and wildlife," says Dallas May, "but it is a community."

Conserving that community in a sustainable way is a goal shared by Dallas and his wife Brenda, and the families of their grown children: Holly, Riley and Haley.

Intense development pressure on native grasslands cannot compete with the family's desire to protect their land's biodiversity. The Mays have partnered with wildlife and conservation organizations that share their land ethic. Their collaborations have improved water quality and quantity by restoring streams, wetlands, and eight playas. Managed grazing on grasslands, installation of wildlife-friendly fencing, native tree plantings, and expanded watering locations have produced a model of how livestock and wildlife can thrive together.

The wetlands on May Ranch provide an oasis for migratory birds. Beef from their grass-fed cattle is marketed with a "Raised on Bird Friendly Land" label as part of the Audubon Society's Conservation Ranching Program. Forty years of selective breeding of registered Limousin cattle has produced cattle with traits complimentary to grasslands and a semi-arid climate. Audubon Society guidelines track the ranch's environmental sustainability, and health, welfare and feeding of the cattle. It's just one way the Mays use third-party verifications to measure and manage conservation success.

Their property is monitored for rangeland health as part of an innovative carbon credit offset program that assigns a fair market value for sequestering carbon in the soil of grazing lands. May Ranch has hosted surveys of bird and botanical species, including when the Denver Botanical Gardens' floristics team identified more than 90 plant species never documented in Prowers County.

A conservation easement held by the Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust ensures that May Ranch will never lose its wildlife habitat and conservation values. Off the ranch, Dallas serves on a variety of community, water, and conservation committees and boards, including the Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission.

Prior to 1994 the May's cropland was irrigated entirely by flood irrigation. Since then, irrigation sprinklers have vastly improved their water efficiency, allowing them to raise more crops with less water. The Mays purchase composted manure from area dairy farms as fertilizer to grow corn and alfalfa that is sold as feed for the dairies. Following the corn harvest, turnips, field radishes, and winter rye are planted as cover crops to benefit the soil.

Conservation's impact on the May Ranch is seen in ways large and small. There's the seven miles of Big Sandy Creek that runs through the ranch. While this tributary of the Arkansas River has been reduced to pools of water and remnant patches of wetland elsewhere, its entire reach across the ranch contains surface water and healthy wetlands. Then there's what a botanical survey discovered. The Wright's false willow is the host plant on which painted grasshopper nymphs can feed.

"Even though it seems disproportionate to compare grasshopper nymphs and the small area they inhabit to miles of wetland and riparian areas and all of the associated species in that large landscape," Dallas May said, "both contribute significantly to the diversity needed for a healthy and thriving ecosystem."

Whether it is the ecosystem, community, or ranch, it's in good hands with the May family.



Finalists

Fetcher Ranch of Routt County

LK Rancho of Rio Blanco County

Presented in Partnership with



KANSAS

DWANE ROTH
HOLCOMB, KANSAS



▶ Watch video of Dwane Roth



Grow crops with less water. That challenge spurred an ever-expanding land ethic in Dwane Roth.

Dwane knew of the declining water level in the Ogallala aquifer he farms above. He felt he was already doing his part by increasing crop yields with reduced equipment and labor costs. Then a cropland landlord challenged him to look into irrigation technology.

Despite droughts and sandy soils prone to wind erosion, he quickly met the challenge and became a sought-after expert on the role of soil moisture management technology's role in water conservation.

As one of Kansas' first "Water Technology Farms" he began demonstrating emerging irrigation technologies, cropping patterns, and management techniques in 2016. Energy-efficient bubblers, probes, cameras and drones delivered irrigation, measured soil moisture, and enabled seamless data collection. Dwane acquired an insatiable appetite for information that showed how innovation could extend the aquifer's lifetime while improving his soil's health.

Dwane soon volunteered more of his 6,000 acres of farmland for the project. Testing irrigation technologies would ultimately lead to adoption by other farmers, but he wasn't willing to wait. He spearheaded an effort that resulted in other area farmers saving more than 35,000 acre-feet of water per year.

With a knack for getting others to see themselves as a community of water users, he organized a summit in 2019 of food supply chain interests in Finney County. With a goal of making the county a model of sustainability in food production, his leadership sustained the effort through 2020's shutdown.

Dwane serves as a technology farm advisor to universities, state agencies and Syngenta. He also works to identify ways to

streamline conservation cost-share programs and simplify decision-making processes for farmers. He regularly attends GreenBiz events that bring together companies, cities and industries to drive technology and sustainability initiatives. It's there where corporate leaders value hearing directly from this innovative fourth-generation Kansas farmer.

Dwane and wife Kim have three daughters. His land ethic has rubbed off on their daughter Grace. Her FFA project began the Kansas Youth Water Advocates Program, which teaches high school students to appreciate and advocate for local water resources.

Dwane is aware that water availability is not the only challenge facing Kansas agriculture. Poor water quality from increasing salinity and heavy metals harms soil and crops. High density cropping with limited crop diversity impacts the region's wildlife. In response, he's seeking other ways to improve the entire ecological community.

He has utilized the Conservation Reserve Program to plant native grasses on more than 100 acres of field corners to improve wildlife habitat. Dwane is experimenting to determine which cover crops provide cattle feed while improving soil health and erosion control in his region. His farming practices have also caught the interest of companies whose mission is reversing climate change.

More than three decades into his farming career, Dwane has begun transitioning ownership of some of his farmland to his nephews. The greatest motivation of this tireless agricultural conservation proponent is making sure the next generation has a chance to grow food while improving the landscape.

Finalists

Vance and Louise Ehmke of Lane County

Ray and Susan Flickner of Dickinson, Hodgeman, McPherson and Norton counties

Glenn and Barbara Walker of Saline County

Presented in Partnership with



KENTUCKY

F.L. SIPES FARM EKRON, KENTUCKY



▶ Watch video of F.L. Sipes Farm



Photos: USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service of Kentucky & The Kentucky Soybean Promotion Board

Farming land his grandmother once owned, Fred L. Sipes says he's a caretaker of a precious resource.

Fred began growing 50 acres of burley tobacco, fresh out of high school in 1994. Even then, conservation was important to him. He knew consistent improvement and diversification would be critical to his farm's survival.

As he acquired and rented more land to raise beef cattle and grow soybeans, corn, wheat, produce and hay, he adopted conservation practices with assistance from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. Determined to leave the land and water better than he found it, he joined the Meade County Conservation District's board, and was an early adopter of a Kentucky Agriculture Water Quality Plan.

Fred established a rotational grazing system with cross fencing for his cattle. Watering facilities and feeding pads were constructed to prevent erosion. The herd's calving season is managed to coincide with ample forage availability and avoid over-grazing. Pastures with native grasses and wildflowers, riparian buffers, and new and repaired grass waterways slow erosion of topsoil while providing habitat for wildlife, aquatic life and insect pollinators.

Given the prevalence of sinkholes in the area, Fred uses buffer strips to prevent groundwater contamination. Establishing buffer strips for conservation purposes also controls input costs by removing unproductive and highly-erodible acres from crop production.

Fred credits no-till practices and cover crops with improving the health of his soil. Cover crops of wheat and rye hold soil in place over the winter and spring. When the cover crops are terminated in the spring, they return organic matter to the soil which nourishes that year's soybean and corn crops. Cover crops also help reduce a field's compaction.

Partnering with agronomy experts on soil sampling and plant tissue testing determines

a crop field's specific nutrient needs. Drift-reducing nozzles and GPS-targeted herbicide applications save money and reduce the potential for over-application and water contamination.

Fred has installed and repaired several waterways, including one on a farm he purchased in 2020. It's one of the improvements he's made since receiving a regional American Soybean Association Conservation Legacy Award in 2019.

Like many farmers, Fred rents some of his cropland from other landowners. He views his landlords as partners, and therefore keeps them informed on crop conditions and conservation improvements, and maintains their fencerows.

Just as Aldo Leopold wrote about the "ethical relationship between people and the land that they manage," Fred is inspired to share his conservation story with consumers. He does so through leadership positions with the Kentucky Soybean Association and Meade County Farm Bureau. He also organizes and hosts field days sponsored by the University of Kentucky Extension Service and local conservation district.

"He exemplifies who today's farmer should be – eager to learn and serve. And more excited to educate others about what he has learned," said Andy Mills, Meade County Extension agent.

Fred and his wife, Stacey, are parents to four-year-old twins, Joe and Sam. Parenthood has made him even more conscious of the environmental footprint he'll leave on the land.

"There is nothing more important to me than preserving and improving the land for these boys," he said.

Finalists

Reddick Farms of Carlisle County
Donald Veatch of Marion County

Presented in Partnership with



MARYLAND

PERSISTENCE CREEK FARM

FAULKNER, MARYLAND



▶ Watch video of Persistence Creek Farm



When the Warrings bought their farm in 2009, they set out to leave it better than they found it. Their Persistence Creek Farm has become a confluence of how farming, fishing and forestry businesses can benefit natural resources.

Healthier soil leads to higher crop yields. Cleaner water leads to higher crab and oyster populations. Agricultural conservation practices are good for the bottom line and natural resources.

The Warrings take soil seriously. They annually rotate crops of corn, soybean and sorghum to sustain soil fertility. They use no-till or minimum tillage on all fields to reduce run-off. Cover crops are planted on all fields to protect soil microorganisms. Nutrient management plans and annual soil tests minimize fertilizer inputs, and maximize yields by tailoring a crop's nutrient needs.

To enhance wildlife habitat and maintain productive forests, the Warrings have utilized financial assistance from the federal Conservation Stewardship Program, and technical guidance from a forester from the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. By following a custom forestry plan, thinning acres of forestland has increased timber growth rates for future harvests, while boosting biodiversity and providing wildlife with food and cover.

Acres of shrubs, maple, pine and oak trees have been planted to reduce streambank erosion. Riparian herbaceous buffers that stretch 50 feet on each side of Ross Branch stream, capture nutrients from crop fields, improve water quality, and provide nesting habitat for wildlife.

Two acres of ponds and wetlands provide habitat for frogs, ducks and deer. Food plots of white clover, sunflowers, corn, and soybeans are planted annually. A self-described "flower geek," Kevin Warring has planted five acres of wildflowers and native grasses in prairie strips to attract Monarch butterflies and other insect pollinators.

A stream crossing project involved re-sloping banks and installing concrete footers and riprap to reduce erosion. The long-term health of the Potomac and Wicomico rivers has been improved by the more than 100 million spat on shell (baby oysters) the Warrings have helped plant since 2014.

Kevin and his father Francis are both active members of the Charles County Waterman's Association, which provides public and legislative outreach on fishery regulations. Both have served as associate supervisors for the Charles Soil Conservation District.

Persistence Creek Farm's enrollment into a perpetual conservation easement permanently preserves its future use for agriculture and forestry, and limits housing or mining development.

Kevin, who has degrees in physics and economics, helped re-establish a FFA chapter in Charles County. The active Farm Bureau member has hosted farm tours for schools and legislators, and appeared on a national conservation-themed podcast.

Kevin also serves as a guide for youth hunting deer, turkey and waterfowl. He shows these hunters and their parents how conservation practices benefit wildlife.

Like Aldo Leopold before them, the Warrings teach others that wildlife is a natural resource that must be managed to ensure its long-term sustainability. They are believers in the inherent land ethic that Leopold first wrote about.

The Warrings say the day they signed the farm's deed was a dream come true. Yet they are quick to note they are just temporary caretakers. Kevin says visible reminders of this are the arrowheads his children frequently find buried across the fields of Persistence Creek Farm.

Finalists

- Ordinary Point Farm of Cecil County
- Persimmon Tree Farm of Carroll County
- Rich Levels Grain, Inc. of Cecil and Kent counties

Presented in Partnership with



MISSOURI

OETTING HOMESTEAD FARMS, INC.

CONCORDIA, MISSOURI



▶ Watch video of Oetting Homestead Farms, Inc.



While some farmers focus on getting bigger, the Oetting family has focused on continually getting better. Steve and Sharon Oetting have a commitment to demonstrating the compatibility of conservation and commerce.

With their sons Sean and Clint and their families, the Oettings grow corn, soybeans, wheat, and custom finish about 3,000 hogs annually. Their efforts to reduce soil erosion, enhance wildlife habitat and protect water and air quality led to Oetting Homestead Farms being certified as one of the first farms in the Missouri Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Stewardship Assurance Program.

Current conservation practices continue a long and proud family legacy. The farm's name is a nod to Steve's great-great-grandfather homesteading its original 40 acres in 1839.

In the 1970s, the Oettings transitioned from dairy to pork production. To store swine manure, they constructed a three-lagoon system with an adjoining 2.8 acre lake which eliminated the need to purchase 1.3 million gallons of fresh water annually. The lake is used for watering livestock and other farm uses including washing barns. Effluent treated in the lagoons is recycled to provide nutrients for crops at a much lower cost than commercial fertilizer.

A healthy population of stocked bluegill, catfish and bass is a testament to the Oettings' success in appropriately applying effluent on the fields in an environmentally sound way.

An additional lake has been constructed to contain runoff from cropland. To prevent erosion elsewhere on the farm, the Oettings have implemented conservation practices which included planting nearly 10,000 trees and installing more than 35 acres of native grass buffers, waterways and filter strips. The farm's lakes and grass buffers provide habitat for several species of birds and wildlife. Food plots are planted each year at various spots on the farm, and a plot for insect pollinators has been established.

Steve, an avid outdoorsman and quail hunter, says a thriving wildlife population is an important indicator of a farm's overall health. Another is the condition of the soil.

To prevent erosion, rotational cropping of no-till corn and soybeans is used on all available cropland. Underground tile outlets and terraces are installed and maintained. In consultation with a certified crop advisor, the family utilizes soil sampling and variable rate fertilizing and seeding practices. The use of precision agriculture enables the Oettings to apply crop nutrients such as nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium, in precise amounts to limit risk of runoff and increase yield potential while cutting input costs.

In 1999, Oetting Homestead Farms began an odor mitigation experiment with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. A stand of odor-inhibiting dogwood trees was planted near hog barns, in addition to a wind break of about 300 oak, ash and cedar trees.

The Oettings have hosted tours for groups ranging from preschool students to international students and ag media, but their conservation outreach and successes don't stop at the end of their driveway.

Sharon served on the National Pork Board, where she played an important role in helping the pork industry focus on environmental and consumer information programs. Steve has served as president of the Missouri Association of Soil and Water Districts.

Together the Oetting family maintains their focus on agricultural production and stewardship to demonstrate that farms can be profitable while improving natural resources and wildlife habitat.

Finalists

Britt Farms, Inc. of Randolph County

Cope Grass Farms of Lincoln County

Presented in Partnership with



MONTANA

HIDDEN HOLLOW HIDEAWAY CATTLE & GUEST RANCH TOWNSEND, MONTANA



▶ Watch video of Hidden Hollow Hideaway Cattle & Guest Ranch

Kelly Flynn taught his daughters to raise a baby lamb, ride a horse, and ultimately, run a ranch.

His land ethic was passed down from relatives who carved a living from the land since the 1860s. He recalled his aging parents pulling weeds on hot days. With those values etched in his mind, he spent a life caring for livestock, wildlife, and 6,000 acres of meadows, creeks and forests.

With his father and brother, and later his wife Jill and daughters Shannon and Siobhan, he developed a paradise for hunters and summer vacationers at Hidden Hollow Hideaway Cattle & Guest Ranch. He took pride in showing hundreds of visitors that you can log timber, raise livestock, and still experience a beautiful landscape.

In Kelly's Leopold Conservation Award application, he humbly referred to himself as the ranch's "temporary steward." He ran the ranch and imparted wisdom until he passed away on March 3, 2021.

A stellar track career took him away to college, and later to Denmark, but he returned to the ranch and mountains he loved. His early conservation efforts centered around removing noxious weeds to maintain pastures for cattle and wildlife habitat. He took his fight against weeds, like Leafy spurge and Canadian thistle, to neighboring parcels owned by federal land agencies unable to fund weed control.

When pine beetles killed thousands of trees on the ranch, the Flynn's removed the dead timber and reseeded grass mixes that would compete with long-dormant noxious weed seeds. These and other timbered areas created attractive park-like settings for guests to hike and view wildlife. Stewarding these timber resources made it more difficult for wildfire to catastrophically ravage the landscape.

Weed control efforts combined with a deferred rotational grazing system created better forage for livestock. Ecologically, the ranch responded with an increase in turkeys, whitetail deer, bluebirds, chokecherry and snowberry. The conservation gains on the landscape also improved the ranch's financial stability.

Kelly's concern for the health of the land went well beyond his property. As a member of the Montana Legislature from 2011 to 2019, he chaired the Fish, Wildlife & Parks Committee and championed conservation legislation. He successfully passed a bill that established the Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program, which provides \$2 million in annual grants to reduce and eliminate noxious weeds on high-value wildlife habitats.

In his award application, Kelly highlighted this Aldo Leopold quote: "I do not imply that this philosophy of land was always clear to me. It is rather the end result of a life journey."

His application read, "I feel the same way. As I grew up over those years, I learned from those who went before me – my mom and dad, my brothers and sisters. Over time, my philosophy of stewardship shared and grew and now in the twilight of my life I'm content to do my best to quietly steward the land as best I can."

There's little doubt that Kelly was the type of landowner that Leopold had in mind when he wrote, "A conservationist is one who is humbly aware that with each stroke, he is writing his signature on the face of his land."

For the betterment of all, Kelly Flynn wrote his signature on Montana's landscape.

Finalists

Pete and Meagan Lannan
of Park County

Peterson Angus Ranch
of Granite County

Presented in Partnership with



NEBRASKA

SWITZER RANCH LOUP COUNTY, NEBRASKA



▶ Watch video of Switzer Ranch

Sarah Sortum and Adam Switzer are siblings and fourth-generation ranchers committed to the stewardship of Switzer Ranch.

They express a land ethic passed down from their parents, Bruce and Sue Ann Switzer, by implementing agricultural conservation practices and connecting others with nature.

In addition to custom grazing beef cattle on 12,000 acres of native prairie, the Switzer family also operates a nature-based tourism business. Calamus Outfitters offers lodging, event space, river float trips, and eco-tours of the Sandhills.

“Our focus really started to shift from being solely a cow-calf operation to being an operation (with) biodiversity goals about 12 years ago,” Sarah said.

To accomplish these goals the Switzers used the ecological processes that helped shape the Great Plains: fire and grazing. A huge motivator for the family was the rapidly disappearing habitat of native prairie grouse.

“At the time, we didn’t realize the plight that grassland birds were in,” she recalls. “If this is their last stronghold, we have got to step up and make sure we provide what they need to survive.”

With assistance from Audubon Nebraska and the World Wildlife Fund, the Switzers learned about bird counting, bird behavior, and other details about the greater prairie-chicken and sharp-tailed grouse. They realized small changes to their ranch management plans could make a big difference for these resident birds that don’t migrate elsewhere.

The Switzers located (and documented with GPS technology) the birds’ breeding grounds on the ranch. This helped prioritize which areas to target for removal of invasive species that threaten bird habitat.

With a lifespan of about five years for the prairie chicken, the Switzers wanted to be sure they quickly focused on the right pockets of the ranch.

“A lot can happen in five years, as far as damaging a whole generation of birds,” Sarah said.

The Switzers received cost-share from the Sandhills Task Force and Nebraska Game and Parks for invasive tree removal and prescribed burns. With support from local Natural Resources Conservation Service staff, they installed wildlife-friendly fencing, added wildlife escape ramps in their watering tanks, and implemented bird and wildlife-friendly haying practices. Land along the Calamus River was placed in a conservation easement with The Nature Conservancy.

The Switzers have met the biodiversity goals they set out to achieve 12 years ago with the use of fire and rotational grazing. They showed that ranchers can create bird and wildlife habitat, while improving water quality, soil health and root systems in the environmentally-sensitive Sandhills.

Not only did their efforts lead to an uptick in bird watchers visiting the ranch, but when Audubon Nebraska designated the ranch as an Important Bird Area, it was among the first private properties in Nebraska with that designation.

Always looking to connect others to the importance of grassland bird habitat, the Switzers even played host to a fun and educational Prairie Chicken Festival.

Resiliency is defined on some ranches as the conservation of natural resources. For others it’s ensuring future economic viability. At Switzer Ranch these attributes go hand in hand.

Presented in
Partnership with



NEW ENGLAND

CHOINIÈRE FAMILY FARM HIGHGATE CENTER, VERMONT



▶ [Watch video of Choiniere Family Farm](#)



Photos: Tucker Boyd

Guy Choiniere believes the health of the soil is the health of the farm. This land ethic drives his actions on a dairy farm that's been in the Choiniere family since 1945.

While navigating changes in the farm economy, climate and farming practices, the Choiniere Family Farm has become a model of innovation and adaptability for other New England dairies.

Located four miles from Quebec, Canada, Choiniere Family Farm's 242 acres of farmland and 70 acres of woodland is crossed by the Rock River and its tributaries. Soil health and erosion control practices have kept the farm productive and resilient despite an increase in severe storms, rainfall and periods of drought in northwest Vermont.

Guy's parents, Henry and Raymonde, placed a conservation easement on the farm and sold its development rights before transferring it to him and his wife Beth in the 1990s. A generation later, Guy and Beth's children, Matt and Hannah, farm with them. The Choinieres sell beef, milk, pork, chicken, eggs, honey and baked goods at a store located on their farm.

Prompted by an unstable market for conventional milk in the 1990s, Guy studied and then transitioned to organic production. It's a move he said was good for his cows, land and bottom line. A few years later he seeded 25 acres of corn to permanent hay and pasture in order to convert his herd to 100 percent grass-fed. That move fetched an even better price for their organic milk.

After taking over the farm, Guy also began addressing environmental issues with assistance from the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service. The conservation plan he developed remains a work in progress today.

To prevent soil erosion and improve water quality, the Choinieres planted 5,000 trees along banks of the impaired Rock River.

They also conveyed a 51-acre river corridor easement that designates an area where the river can meander naturally. The land can still be farmed, but the river will not be dredged. There is also a permanent 50-foot naturally vegetated buffer along 12,000 feet of the river's bank.

Keeping nutrients on the farm and out of the river was also aided when Guy switched from conventional liquid manure storage to an innovative compost bedded pack system. During the winter the cows are fed hay in large hoop barns designed to mimic the comfort and atmosphere of being on pasture. Excess hay provides bedding and catches manure before being trod down into compost. When the cows resume rotational grazing in May, pigs are let into the barns to root around and expedite the composting process before it is spread on fields as nutrient-rich fertilizer. Guy is an ambassador to help other dairies manage bedded pack systems.

Guy is also an instructor for the Champlain Basin Watershed Initiative. This partnership between Vermont, New York and Quebec educates elementary school teachers participating in a course called A Watershed for Every Classroom. The teachers are then equipped to teach their students – future stewards of Lake Champlain – how agricultural conservation practices address water quality issues.

Choiniere Family Farm participates in Vermont's roadside sign program that identifies conservation practices like rotational grazing, cover crops, no-till and streamside plantings. The Choinieres, who were Vermont's Conservation Farmers of the Year in 2009, are now the first New England Leopold Conservation Award recipients from the Green Mountain State.

Finalists

Bread and Butter Farm
of Shelburne, Vermont

Cedar Mountain Farm
of Hartland, Vermont

Wheel-View Farm
of Shelburne, Massachusetts

Presented in Partnership with



NEW MEXICO

UTE CREEK CATTLE COMPANY BUEYEROS, NEW MEXICO



▶ Watch video of Ute Creek Cattle Company



Finalist

JX Ranch of Quay County

Presented in Partnership with



Inspired by seven generations of family on the land and Aldo Leopold's land ethic, Tuda Libby Crews approached land restoration by collaborating with others.

Tuda and her husband Jack realized restoration of Ute Creek Cattle Company required open minds, innovation, and financial/technical resources. Implementing conservation practices has transformed their shortgrass prairie ecosystem.

Partnering with the Natural Resources Conservation Service in 2002, an Environmental Quality Incentives Program contract helped the Crews establish an adaptive grazing system to create 23 pastures from the original four. A water distribution system was established with pipelines and storage tanks to provide water for livestock and wildlife.

Time-managed adaptive grazing of their Angus cow herd remains critical to all of the Crews' soil health and wildlife habitat goals. This system maximizes forage production, soil disturbance and natural fertilization, while increasing wildlife habitat on the once ecologically-degraded landscape. Grazing riparian areas in the dormant season protects bird species in that prime habitat during breeding and nesting seasons.

Tuda and Jack stabilized creek banks with erosion-control materials. They cut and piled three miles of dead salt cedar trees to create habitat for quail. Grazing goats also helped control salt cedars and other invasive species. Within 10 years of partnering with NRCS, New Mexico Water Trust Board, and Ute Creek Soil & Water Conservation Service, Ute Creek was a perennial water source and regional model of riparian restoration.

Diverse wildlife and bird species have increased and so has the quality of the cow herd; the sale of high-quality calves provides the ranch with operating revenue. To diversify income, the ranch has a hunting-lease enterprise to manage its elk, pronghorn, and

white tail and mule deer populations. The Crews plan to re-introduce prescribed burning to improve grass palatability, stimulate forage production, and increase species biodiversity.

Nationwide, habitat loss from development, the climate crisis, and shortage of healthy forage under the vast migratory flyway has imperiled shortgrass prairie birds. With the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Tuda established a 23-acre wild bird sanctuary providing water, a small grape vineyard, breeding and nesting areas, bird houses, and a few shade trees. As nature's indicators of land health, bird species numbers are used as the yardstick to measure progress. The number of identified bird species has increased from 17 in 2004 to over 100 in 2018.

As a national advocate for preserving prairie ecosystems, Tuda's land ethic is felt beyond the ranch's fences. She helped form Partnerscapes, a national landowner-led conservation organization, which encourages landowner-leaders to become part of the solution by implementing conservation practices on private lands.

Tuda and Jack aim to leave the land healthier than they found it, and that mantra includes succession planning for future generations. Their adult children: Libby (Peter) Wood and Ted (Sadie Jo) and their families are committed to upholding conservation practices, animal welfare and wildlife habitat while providing all-natural, quality food for beef consumers. This lead-by-example approach earned them a regional Environmental Stewardship Award from the National Cattlemen's Beef Association in 2019.

Two years later their hard work, ability to work synergistically while holding themselves to a high standard of land stewardship is being honored with New Mexico's first Leopold Conservation Award.



NEW YORK

TABLE ROCK FARM CASTILE, NEW YORK



▶ [Watch video of Table Rock Farm](#)



Photos: Rebecca Drabik, Tucker Boyd and Kevin Raymond

When it comes to on-farm research, Table Rock Farm is at the head of the class.

Its owners and employees have long understood the importance of opening the dairy farm's barns and fields to researchers. Whether it's improving conservation, cows or crops, the results have a positive ripple effect throughout agriculture.

At Table Rock Farm, 1,800 acres of corn and alfalfa are grown to feed a herd of 1,150 dairy cows. Crop rotations, conservation tillage and cover crops are utilized to promote soil health and prevent erosion.

Cover crop techniques are the focus of a three-year study that soil health specialists from American Farmland Trust are conducting at Table Rock Farm. To protect fields from erosion during the winter, a cover crop is planted as corn silage is harvested.

Located just two hours from Cornell, Table Rock Farm has hosted various studies with the university. Topics ranged from how often to test dry matter in cattle feed, seasonal swings in a cow's colostrum production and quality, and which grasses and seeding rates are best for planting into alfalfa fields.

The farm is best known for the innovative cover and flare system on its manure storage. To protect resources, reduce waste, and improve air quality, Table Rock Farm worked with a team of professionals, including New York's Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM) program, to develop an intricate system that separates solids from liquids in cow manure, and prevents methane from being released into the atmosphere.

Separated manure solids are treated to reduce bacteria before being recycled into bedding. The clean and comfy product has resulted in better cow health and comfort. The manure system's cover keeps out rain, reduces odor, and allows spreading during optimum weather conditions. The entire project is the subject of a video used

statewide to inform farmers, legislators and others about its benefits.

Farm owner Meghan Hauser and her late father, Willard De Golyer, began working with the Wyoming County Soil and Water Conservation District in 2003 to complete the first tiers of the AEM program. To improve water quality, a series of grass waterways and underground outlets have been installed to collect leachate from silage bunkers and divert runoff from the roofs of farm buildings.

Meghan is adept at educating others about agriculture, whether the general public or the farm's 125 neighboring families. She shares updates on the farm's Facebook page and at events held for the landowners who rent cropland to Table Rock Farm.

Meghan and Willard were encouraged by one of the farm's employees to sell the plow and adopt no-till practices 19 years ago. Before Willard passed away one year ago, he took pride in the farm's enthusiastic, thoughtful team of employees. Each brings an ethic of treating the cows and land right. Meghan and her mother Maureen De Golyer refer to their 35 full and part-time employees as "a family farm of 35 families."

Her own family's roots on the farm run deep. Her great grandfather was a civil engineer who followed a dream of farming with 10 cows and a flock of sheep. Her grandfather Avery and great uncle Cal began dairying after World War II. After a barn fire in the 1960s, they built a freestall barn. Cal remained active on the farm until his death in 2018 at the age of 95. Willard grew the herd's size in the 1980s and built a modern milking parlor in the 1990s. Today, Meghan is farming with her own children and passing on a land ethic from those who farmed before her.

Finalists

Greenfield Farms, LLC
of Onondaga County

Honorone Farm
of Montgomery County

Presented in Partnership with



NORTH DAKOTA

SAND RANCH

ELLENDALE, NORTH DAKOTA



▶ Watch video of Sand Ranch



Brad Sand planted 12 rows of trees, each more than a mile long, with help from a local conservation group when he began cattle ranching in 1974.

"I did it for the wildlife, the soil, and for my cattle," he said.

The same can be said of his implementation of conservation practices at Sand Ranch ever since.

"When you take an active role in making the land better, it'll take care of you and the people who eat your food," Brad said.

By using what he learned in classes and on ranch tours, Brad reduced his risk from volatile markets and extreme weather events. Sand Ranch has become an example of how conservation can be environmentally and economically beneficial.

Sand Ranch's 700 acres are located in the Drift Prairie physiographic region: home to some of North America's best grasslands and depressional prairie pothole wetlands.

"I enjoy using cattle to manage the resource," he said.

Brad's rotational grazing strategy mimics how bison once roamed the prairie. Short, intense bursts of grazing followed by a long recovery time for the grass. Grazing stimulates plant root growth, enhances nutrient cycling in the soil, and produces diversified grassland species.

A grazing partnership he helped establish with the North Dakota Game and Fish Department on public Wildlife Management Areas increases his feed production, while enhancing wildlife habitat and recreational experiences for the general public. In the early 2000s he partnered with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service to build wildlife-friendly cross fencing.

Brad also works with Ducks Unlimited to improve his grazing system and restore native grasses on marginally productive soils. He

regularly hosts tours to facilitate cooperation between agriculture and environmental organizations to advance the cause of private lands conservation. He also fields calls and emails from farmers, ranchers and conservation biologists as part of the North Dakota Grazing Lands Coalition's mentorship network.

The restorative powers of grazing were evident when he turned 80 acres of hay into a pasture. Years of haying had exported carbon, resulting in degraded soil health and less diversity and density of grasses. All of that reversed by returning cattle to the land.

"Grazing cattle on this hayland has improved forage production," he said. "Instead of constantly removing carbon, now I'm putting something back."

Brad has always grazed cattle on recently harvested crop fields to reduce winter feed costs and grow less hay. He began planting cover crops in 2010 to provide even more feed, attract beneficial insect pollinators, and improve the soil's biology.

Healthy soils tend to have increased water infiltration rates and can hold more residual moisture, which is important during dry years. The mix of cool and warm season grasses and forbs in his pastures are also how he manages for drought.

The fall of 2020 was especially dry, but Sand Ranch didn't run out of grass. In fact, some deer hunters asked Brad why he hadn't grazed his pastures, when he had. The healthy soil had held enough moisture to keep growing grass amid a drought.

It was visible proof of how embracing conservation has improved soil, water, wildlife and livestock, just like the 12 rows of trees from decades ago.

Finalist

Spring Valley Cattle
of Morton County

Presented in Partnership with



OKLAHOMA

LAZY KT RANCH FREEDOM, OKLAHOMA



▶ Watch video of Lazy KT Ranch



Lazy KT Ranch's story is one of resilience. A mother and daughter's land ethic has revived the native grasslands of a ranch located a few miles east of the Dust Bowl's epicenter.

As a child, Rose Kline Blunk took shelter at a neighbor's home on Black Sunday. The bank took her family's cattle as they struggled through the Great Depression. During a severe drought during the 1950s, she vividly remembers the sky turning gray and the wind feeling like a sandblaster. Since then, the importance of caring for the land has never left her.

Rose's daughter, Katie Blunk, grew up on the Blunk family ranch. Her time with horses, cattle, and dogs influenced her decision to become a veterinarian. When Katie's father died in 1995, Rose inherited what would later become Lazy KT Ranch.

Drought, cedar trees and over grazing had ravaged the ranch's landscape. Although Rose was overwhelmed by its decline, she shouldered the task of preserving the land for the next generation. She cut cedar trees and brought prescribed fire management to the ranch with the financial and technical assistance of the local USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service office.

In 2012, after retiring from her veterinary medicine career in Nevada, Katie came home to her ranching roots with her husband Michael Hornvedt. She embarked on her life's next journey, an immersion into conservation and cattle ranching. A decade later, the Lazy KT Ranch is thriving from an ecological and business perspective.

For Katie and Michael, good land stewardship practices go hand in hand with good stockmanship practices. Whether selling quality Black Angus cattle as seed stock to other ranchers, or selling beef directly to consumers under their "Jackass Ridge Beef" label, they provide their customers with assurances that

their cattle have been raised in a low stress environment.

To reduce erosion and protect water quality and quantity, riparian areas have been fenced off and ponds have been built. Pipelines, water storage, and solar powered watering systems have been installed.

Grazing cattle helps meet their rangeland restoration goals. A cycle of prescribed fire, rotational grazing and a period of rest mimics the days when bison roamed prairies that were reinvigorated by wildfires.

Katie says the best and most economical conservation tool for their ranch is the strategic application of prescribed fire and grazing. This combination has restored the prairie ecosystem while producing quality forage for cattle, and wildlife habitat. She credits the Cimarron Range Preservation Association with encouraging this approach. Katie serves as president of the association which brings neighbors together with neighbors to help with beneficial prescribed fires.

Serving in that role and as a local conservation district board member are ways she helps educate and inspire others to address conservation issues. Katie encourages landowners to adopt pollinator-friendly stewardship practices through her involvement with the Okies for Monarchs campaign.

Wildflowers and native grasses have been seeded across the ranch's 1,525 acres to provide habitat for native pollinators, Monarch butterflies and lesser prairie chickens.

The reemergence of the prairie, wildlife and cattle to the Lazy KT Ranch are all testaments to the landscape's recovery, regenerative ranching practices, and the land ethic of its stewards.

Presented in Partnership with



PENNSYLVANIA

BRUBAKER FARMS MOUNT JOY, PENNSYLVANIA



▶ Watch video of Brubaker Farms



Brubaker Farms is a showcase for agricultural conservation amid more than a half million residents in Lancaster County.

With residential developments bordering its 1,800 acres, Brubaker Farms is where the rural-urban interface occurs. Its neatly manicured farmstead is home to 1,300 dairy cows and 52,000 broiler chickens. Despite its size, the farm's public outreach and neighborly farming practices are a selling point when nearby homes are on the market.

Choosing conservation projects with economic and environmental benefits has defined the Brubaker's philosophy on land stewardship and growth.

Luke Brubaker and his sons, Mike and Tony, were early adopters of soil health and nutrient management practices, and energy-producing technologies. Their land ethic has been passed on to Josh Brubaker, who recently became the fourth generation with a stake in the farm's ownership.

Much of the farm is in a wellhead protection area, which means its soil filters rainwater that eventually provides drinking water from their neighbors' wells. To protect water quality, the Brubakers plant cover crops each year and practice no-till farming. With credits earned for their innovative cropping practices, Brubaker Farms was among Pennsylvania's first farms to trade nutrient credits with local wastewater treatment plants.

With assistance from the federal Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program they fenced cattle away from streams and planted trees in 15 acres of riparian buffers. As a result, deer, turtles and waterfowl are thriving, and a stream running through the farm is a highly productive fly fishing-only zone designated for trout.

As the Brubakers grew their dairy herd, they improved their ability to store, handle and apply manure in ways that help minimize its environmental impact while maximizing its economic value as fertilizer. Their anaerobic manure digester kills pathogens and collects methane from the manure. Manure is then pumped through a separator which presses out the solids from the liquids, creating a sanitary bedding product for cattle. Neighbors appreciate that the fertilizer produces less odor.

When the Brubakers began milking cows at a secondary location they installed a buried pipeline to transport manure to the main dairy where the digester was located.

The Brubakers 'dragline apply' manure on 500 acres. This prevents soil compaction from large manure spreading equipment, and it keeps heavy, noisy equipment off of local roads.

Brubaker Farms built a methane digester in 2007 to convert manure into electricity. It produces enough energy for the farm and 325 homes, while improving air quality by capturing and destroying greenhouse gases. Excess heat created by the digester is recycled to heat buildings and pasteurize milk fed to calves.

Most water is used for more than one purpose on the farm. Water to chill milk tanks is later used as drinking water for cattle.

As a frequent site for tours on conservation, sustainability, animal welfare and modern farming practices, Pennsylvania's newest Leopold Conservation Award recipient shows the synergy between profit, people, production agriculture and the planet.

Finalists

- Glen Cauffman of Perry County
- Dotterer Farms of Clinton County

Presented in Partnership with



SOUTH DAKOTA

PRAIRIE PARADISE FARMS

FORT PIERRE, SOUTH DAKOTA



Photos: SDSHC/USDA-NRCS South Dakota & Carlissa Zysser

▶ Watch video of Prairie Paradise Farms

Presented in
Partnership with



Aldo Leopold wrote, "Prairie was, in fact, a community of wild animals and plants so organized, as to build, through the centuries, the rich soil which now feeds us."

Levi and Crystal Neuharth connect with this quote, as they sustainably manage cropland and grassland at Prairie Paradise Farms.

The Neuharths' land ethic stems from Levi's father, David, a self-described "kid from the city." David developed a love for agriculture by working on farms in his youth. After buying his own farm, he met Dr. Dwayne and Ruth Beck, who taught him the importance of soil structure and conservation practices. He soon found himself all-in on improving soil health by adopting no-till practices. He boldly sold all of his tillage equipment, invested in a no-till drill, and established crop rotations. In the years since, the Neuharths have noticed regenerative practices help lessen the risks of volatile markets and weather.

Levi and Crystal took over management of Prairie Paradise Farms in 2016. Levi is a founding member and current chairman of the South Dakota Soil Health Coalition, so they make decisions based on the five principles of soil health:

1. Keep the soil covered.
2. Disturb as little as possible.
3. Keep living roots growing as much as possible.
4. Include diversity in plant communities.
5. Integrate livestock.

The crop residue left behind from no-till practices provides a protective armor for the soil, which creates habitat for soil organisms, prevents erosion and evaporation, and keeps the soil cool on hot days. Crop rotations on 2,500 acres of farmland help break the cycle of disease, pests and weeds. A diverse rotation of crops allows them to capture different markets and spread out

the risk from weather events. The Neuharths grow spring and winter wheat, milo, peas, teff, oats, millet, sunflowers, flax, garbanzo beans, lentils, corn, hay barley, as well as cover crops.

The Neuharths raise diverse livestock as well. What began as a source of milk for one of their children with allergies, is now a herd of 100 dairy goats. In addition to 4-H projects for their three children (Johnathon, Justin, and Kaydee), the goats are an important and beneficial enterprise for the farm.

Goats prefer forbs over grasses, including undesirable weeds like Canadian thistle. When a goat eats a plant, the seeds it passes through its digestive tract becomes sterile unable to regrow. Their goats are grazed around water sources and weedy areas to help control pests without using chemicals. Likewise, a free-range flock of 150 laying hens help with insect control and provide an additional source of income.

Although the Neuharths have been rotationally grazing their 3,000 acres of grasslands since 2010, they do not own any cattle. Their custom grazing business provides daily monitoring and frequent rotations to fresh pastures for other people's beef cattle.

Active in a variety of agricultural and community organizations, Prairie Paradise Farms hosts a Family Day in May where visitors partake in hands-on educational stations on topics such as livestock, insects, germinating seeds, soil layers, and grain identification.

With assistance from the USDA-NRCS and their local conservation district, the Neuharths have planted nearly 20 miles of trees to create wildlife habitat.

It's clear this is one farm that is living up to its name.



TEXAS

SAN PEDRO RANCH CARRIZO SPRINGS, TEXAS



▶ Watch video of San Pedro Ranch



Land stewardship is about balance.

If a ranch is managed solely for the purpose of grazing cattle, the rest of its ecosystem falls out of balance. Hugh Fitzsimons Jr. embraced a more holistic approach at his San Pedro Ranch in the 1970s. He believed if you improved native habitat, the ecosystem would not only lead to more wildlife, but to healthier livestock.

His children, Joseph Fitzsimons and Pamela Fitzsimons Howard, and their children's families continue that land ethic today.

San Pedro Ranch is a unique confluence of geologic, riparian, biologic, herbaceous and cultural resources. The property sits atop an ancient sea bed, on the southern edge of Texas' Tamaulipan and Chihuahuan Biotic Provinces. Its 23,000 acres are covered by 26 different soil types and 36 different plant communities. The land has been inhabited over time by four distinct cultural groups. On the map, it straddles Dimmit and Maverick counties, about 30 miles southwest of Carrizo Springs, near the Rio Grande River.

The ranch is home to a herd of registered Beefmaster cattle, a breed known for being heat, drought and insect resistant. Regenerative grazing practices coupled with prescribed burns and brush management, have helped to increase native plant diversity, water infiltration and enhance herbaceous cover.

The Fitzsimons and Howard families designed more than 100 rock and earthen structures to trap sediment, build soil and establish vegetation as part of a riparian restoration

project. Over 22,000 feet of a degraded creek channel was restored across a 700-acre watershed. Elsewhere, Ducks Unlimited helped convert a 14-acre gravel pit into an ephemeral wetland. After being hydroseeded with a seed mix of 42 native grass and forb species, the wetland serves as a wintering ground for waterfowl species.

The ranch is a stopover point along the flight corridor for many migrating birds and monarch butterflies. Butterflies will be tagged to help researchers monitor their numbers. The Fitzsimons and Howards have also compiled 90 years of rainfall data to improve management in the drought-prone region.

In addition to installing miles of water line and supplying new watering stations, the careful attention the Fitzsimons and Howards have dedicated to environmental conservation has provided habitat for dove, quail, Rio Grande wild turkey, and other rare species such as the Texas tortoise and Texas horned lizard.

A conservation easement through the Texas Agricultural Land Trust restricts industrial and commercial development, and prohibits fragmentation of the ranch. The easement ensures it will remain an important ecological site and riparian corridor for native and migratory wildlife species in perpetuity.

The conservation success and land ethic of the Fitzsimons and Howard families earned the ranch a Lone Star Land Steward Ecoregion Award (representing South Texas) in 2016. They say they are just getting started and learning to ranch in nature's image.

Presented in
Partnership with



UTAH

YARDLEY CATTLE COMPANY

BEAVER, UTAH



▶ Watch video of Yardley Cattle Company

"Treat the range like a lady," is just one piece of advice Gilbert Yardley gave his son Steven.

For five generations the Yardleys have embraced a sacred stewardship for the land their livelihood depends on.

Best known for selling high quality beef cattle, the Yardleys know good livestock production begins with conservation practices that benefit the forage upon which their cattle rely.

"If we take care of the range, it will take care of us," Gilbert said of grasses and shrubs that grow on their fragile desert range.

Gilbert, 87, is the patriarch of the family behind the Yardley Cattle Company, which oversees, assists in, and coordinates in the management of more than 60,000 acres of private and rental property, and adjacent federal land. Just as they do on their own land, the Yardleys work to maintain a thriving ecological balance with range conservationists from Utah State Trust lands, the federal Bureau of Land Management, and U.S. Forest Service.

Their holistic and sustainable approach to range management, also applies to raising cattle and customer relations. In addition to a cow-calf operation, they sell high quality purebred Black Angus, Simmental and Maine Anjou cattle from coast to coast.

"You can do more damage in a year of overgrazing than you can make up for in a lifetime," is another piece of fatherly advice Steven recalls. As a result, their herd's size is reduced in seasons of drought. In extreme conditions they keep cattle off pastures to protect the landscape.

The Yardleys see managing natural resources as a science and an art; A science in learning, and an art in applying.

In partnership with others, they've rehabilitated thousands of acres of rangelands with controlled burns, removal of

Juniper and Pinion trees and invasive brush, and reseeding with native grasses. Their work to stop the spread of Spotted knapweed in Garfield County has nearly eradicated the noxious weed. With the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, the Yardleys planted water-loving grasses in streambed riparian areas and installed protective fencing to prevent erosion.

By digging several water catchment ponds along a creek, the Yardleys improve water quality downstream by catching silt while providing a water source in otherwise arid locations. Livestock, wildlife, songbirds and amphibians are also provided water in far reaches of the ranch thanks to the development of 12 wells, eight pipelines, and five springs that stand as oases in the desert.

The Yardleys are transitioning from windmills to solar panels to operate the wells. While both are sources of renewable energy, the panels are more reliable and have the ability to push water up pipelines.

As a former state FFA officer who now serves as the Western Rangelands Conservation Association's vice president, Steven aims to set a high example of what agricultural conservation and animal husbandry can achieve, despite what agriculture's vocal critics say.

Steven can trace his roots back to when his great-great-grandfather began raising cattle outside of Beaver in 1856, but he takes the most satisfaction in looking forward.

He thinks the most important work that takes place at Yardley Cattle Company is teaching children about the land, the plants on it and the animals that utilize them. It's his way of passing along his family's deep, abiding love for the land they ranch on, the water they manage, and their Western way of life.

Finalists

Lewis Farms of San Juan County
Myrin Ranch of Duchesne County

Presented in Partnership with



WISCONSIN

JOHN AND DOROTHY PRISKE

FALL RIVER, WISCONSIN



▶ Watch video of John and Dorothy Priske



John and Dorothy Priske liken their fields and pastures to sons and daughters.

They've worked shoulder to shoulder to improve their farm's environmental and economic resilience with conservation practices and direct marketing.

Both were born on Wisconsin farms, but their path back to farming was hard won. They worked off-farm jobs out West before saving enough for a down payment on 280 acres in Columbia County in 1986. After growing asparagus with John's brother, their first years of raising livestock and row crops were met with struggle due to low commodity prices.

A visit to a grass-fed beef and sheep station in New Zealand convinced them to change course.

The Priskes began transitioning their crop fields to pastures. Deep-rooted grasses benefit soil health by accumulating soil organic matter, infiltrating water, and sequestering carbon. A continuous living cover reduces the risk of soil erosion.

They chose a breed of cattle, Scottish Highland, that could eat an oak savanna's rough forage. They devised a rotational grazing system that would benefit the cattle and the landscape.

By the early 2000s direct marketing their beef became the backbone of the farm. They supplied choice cuts to high-end Madison restaurants, and sold beef at the Dane County Farmers' Market. It was at their market booth where they would show customers a notebook detailing their conservation practices.

"They're not just buying our beef. They're buying our farming practices," Dorothy said.

The Priskes also shared their lessons learned with other farmers by hosting field days and seminars on profitably managing land and direct marketing beef.

They built relationships with their customers and conservationists as well. In 2004 they were

selected to attend Terra Madre, a gathering of 5,000 farmers from 130 countries committed to sustainable farming methods. The Priskes helped train district conservationists on working with farmers, and leased land for Madison College's Institute of Sustainable Agriculture.

In 2017, in collaboration with University of Wisconsin researchers, the Priskes planted 12 acres of Kernza, a perennial grain with an extensive root system. Two years later they hosted an international Kernza conference, attracting researchers from across the globe to view their fields of the deep-rooted wheatgrass species. Their grain was sold to Patagonia Provisions that made the world's first beer from Kernza, aptly named Long Root Ale.

Over the years the Priskes restored 30 acres of tall grass prairie, and 30 acres of prairie wetland previously drained for cultivation. Such efforts earned them the "Leopold Restoration Award of Excellence in Ecological Restoration Practices" from the Friends of the University of Wisconsin Arboretum.

Now retired, the Priskes remain active in promoting responsible land management and agricultural sustainability. They've sold all of their Scottish Highland cattle, and rent their pastures to other graziers. They maintain land enrolled in the federal Conservation Reserve Program with prescribed burnings.

To protect their legacy, the Priskes placed an agricultural conservation easement with the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection on the farm that restricts development in perpetuity.

The Priskes tell visitors that viewing their farm is like "seeing a piece of their souls."

It's a fitting remark from the newest recipients of the Wisconsin Leopold Conservation Award; It was Aldo Leopold who wrote, "The landscape of any farm is the owner's portrait of himself."

Finalists

Mike Berg of Lafayette County

Charlie Hammer and Nancy Kavazanjian of Dodge County

Presented in Partnership with



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COLORADO

American Farmland Trust
Colorado Cattlemen's Association
Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust
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MONTANA

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Montana Department of Natural Resources & Conservation
Montana Rangeland Resources Committee
Sibanye Stillwater
TC Energy
Northwest Farm Credit Services
USDA NRCS

World Wildlife Fund
C Lazy J Livestock, Inc.
McDonald's
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Montana Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative
Ranchers Stewardship Alliance
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NEW YORK

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New York State Agribusiness Association
USDA NRCS

NORTH DAKOTA

American Farmland Trust
North Dakota Grazing Lands Coalition
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North Dakota Stockmen's Association
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North Dakota Department of Environmental Quality
North Dakota Partners for Fish and Wildlife

North Dakota Natural Resources Trust
Pheasants Forever
Roughrider Electric Cooperative
Slope Electric Cooperative
The Nature Conservancy in North Dakota
The Wildlife Society of North Dakota
USDA NRCS

OKLAHOMA

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PENNSYLVANIA

American Farmland Trust
The Heinz Endowments
Pennsylvania Farm Bureau
EDPR NA Distributed Generation
USDA NRCS
Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts
Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture



SOUTH DAKOTA

American Farmland Trust
 South Dakota Cattlemen's Association
 South Dakota Grasslands Coalition
 First Dakota National Bank
 South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources
 South Dakota Department of Game, Fish & Parks
 South Dakota Farm Bureau Federation
 South Dakota State University College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences
 USDA NRCS
 Audubon Dakota
 Bad River Ranches
 Belle Fourche River Watershed Partnership
 Blair Brothers Angus Ranch
 Cammack Ranch

Daybreak Ranch
 Ducks Unlimited
 Jim and Karen Kopriva
 McDonald's
 Millborn Seeds, Inc.
 North Central SARE - Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education
 Professional Alliance
 South Dakota Agricultural Land Trust
 South Dakota's Conservation Districts
 South Dakota Pheasants Forever
 South Dakota Soil Health Coalition
 The Nature Conservancy in South Dakota
 Todd Mortenson Family
 U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service - Partners for Fish & Wildlife
 Wagner Land & Livestock

TEXAS

American Farmland Trust
 Texas Parks & Wildlife
 Lee and Ramona Bass
 The Cynthia & George Mitchell Foundation
 Dixon Water Foundation
 McDonald's

UTAH

American Farmland Trust
 Utah Farm Bureau Federation
 Western AgCredit
 Utah Cattlemen's Association
 Producers Livestock Marketing Association
 The Nature Conservancy in Utah
 Utah Association of Conservation Districts

Utah Department of Agriculture and Food
 Utah Wool Growers Association

WISCONSIN

American Farmland Trust
 Dairy Farmers of Wisconsin
 Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation
 Compeer Financial
 Culver's
 McDonald's
 USDA NRCS
 We Energies Foundation
 Wisconsin Corn Growers Association
 Wisconsin Corn Promotion Board
 Wisconsin Land and Water Conservation Association
 Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association

PAST RECIPIENTS:

CALIFORNIA

2020
 Burroughs Family of Farms
 Ward and Rosie Burroughs
 2019
 Rominger Brothers Farms
 Bruce and Rick Rominger
 2018
 Lundberg Family Farms
 2017
 Thomson International, Inc.
 C. Jeff Thompson
 2016
 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

2020
 Collins Ranch
 Toby and Amy Johnson
 2019
 The Livingston Ranch
 Mike and Julie Livingston
 2018
 Beatty Canyon Ranch
 Steve and Joy Wooten Family
 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

2020
 Flying W Ranch
 Josh and Gwen Hoy
 2019
 Ted Alexander
 2018
 Hoeme Family Farm
 and Ranch
 Stacy and Chaston Hoeme

2017
 Lazy VJ Farms
 The Vorhees Family

2016
 2S Land & Cattle
 Randy and Nicole Small

2015
 Sproul Ranch
 Sproul Family

KENTUCKY

2020
 JRS Angus Farm
 James R. "Buddy" Smith
 2019
 Dr. James W. Middleton
 2018
 Trunnell Family Farm
 Edward (Myrel)
 and Shirley Trunnell
 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
 2020
 Yoder Farms
 Joshlin and Addie Yoder
 2019
 Brinker Farms
 Kenny and Susan
 Brinker Family

Innovations on the Land: Resilient Farms and Ranches

2021 Symposium Sponsors

Harvey L. & Maud C. Sorensen Foundation
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 Farm Credit
 Enel Green Power
 Trinchera Blanca Foundation
 Colorado State University's Warner College
 of Natural Resources
 National Cattlemen's Beef Association
 The Nature Conservancy
 Panorama Organic
 Field to Market
 Western Landowners Alliance



2018
Scherder Farms
John and Sandy Scherder

2017
Uptown Farms
Matt and Kate Lambert

MONTANA

2020
C Lazy J Livestock
Craig and Conni French

2019
Milton Ranch
Bill and Dana Milton

NEBRASKA

2020
Someday Farm
Ed and Leta Olson

2019
Broken Box Ranch
Russ and Angela
Sundstrom

2018
RuJoDen Ranch
Jim and Lora
O'Rourke Family

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

NEW ENGLAND

2020
Rinta Family Farm
Linda Rinta

2019
Hull Forest Products
Bill Hull

NEW YORK

2020
Sang Lee Farms
Fred and William Lee

NORTH DAKOTA

2020
Dockter-Jensen Ranch
Kerry and Brenda Dockter,
Kyle and Kristi Jensen

2019
Goven Ranch
Gene and Christine Goven

2018
The Wilson Family Farm
Jeremy and
Sarah Wilson

2017
Miller Ranch
Ken and Bonnie Miller

2016
Black Leg Ranch
Jerry and Renae Doan

OKLAHOMA

2020
Victor Ranch
Grant Victor Jr.

2019
The Chuck and Ruth
Coffey Family

2018
Jackson Farms
Russ and Jani Jackson

2017
Emmons Farm
Jimmy and Ginger
Emmons

PENNSYLVANIA

2020
Slate Ridge Dairy Farm
Ben and Sharon Peckman

2019
Mt-Glen Farms
Dean and
Rebecca Jackson

2018
Harvest Home Farms
The DiFebo Family

SOUTH DAKOTA

2020
Blair Brothers Angus Ranch
Ed, Rick, Chad and
Britton Blair

2019
Johnson Farms
Alan, Mickie, Brian and
Jamie Johnson

2018
Cammack Ranch
Gary and
Amy Cammack

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
Gupfill Angus
Gupfill Family

2012
Kopriva Angus
Kopriva Family

2011
Mortenson Ranch
Mortenson Family

2010
Doud Ranch
Rick and Marlis Doud

TEXAS

2019
Killam Duval
County Ranch
David Killam

2018
Laborcitas Creek Ranch
Berdon and
Rolanette Lawrence

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

2020
Half Circle Cross Ranch
Colby and McKenzie
Pace Family

2019
JY Ferry & Son, Inc.
John, Ben and
Joel Ferry

2018
Ercanbrack Livestock
Ed and Dixie
Ercanbrack Family

2017
Circle Bar Ranch
Fred Thurston

2016
Jerold Richins Ranch
Jerold 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

2020
Eron Farm
John and Melissa Eron

2019
Lake Family Farms
Jeff Lake

2018
Gold Star Dairy
David Geiser

2017
Brickstead Dairy
Dan Brick and Family

2016
Brooks Farms
Brooks Family

2015
Meuer Farm
David and Leslie Meuer

2014
Herricks Dairy Farm
Jack and Pat Herricks
Family

2013
Cates Family Farm
Dick and Kim Cates

2012
Hebbe Family Farm
Jim and Val Hebbe

2011
Koepeke Farms Inc.
Koepeke Family

2010
Bragger Family Dairy
Joe and Noel Bragger

2008
Terry Peters Logging
Terry Peters

2006
Gery Mich

WYOMING

2017
Garrett Ranch
Pete and Ethel Garrett

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

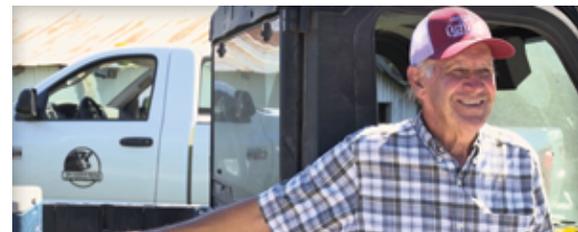
2010
7E Ranch
Ron and Linda Heward

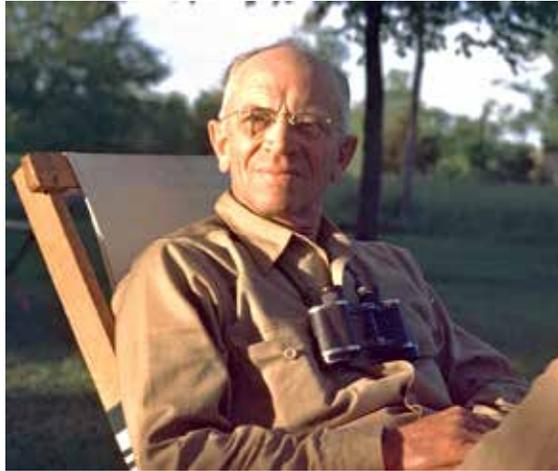
2009
Foy Ranch
Rocky and Nancy Foy

2008
Pape Ranch
Norm and Barbara Pape

2007
Golden Willow Ranch
Paul and Catherine
Kukowski

2006
Barlow Livestock, Inc.
Glenn and Joy Barlow





“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*

