



YEAR IN REVIEW



What happens on private agricultural land affects us all. Farmers, ranchers and foresters who are good stewards of the land provide not only healthy food for our table, but clean, abundant water, healthy soil and thriving wildlife.

Sand County Foundation's dedication to the cause of private landowner conservation leadership is inspired by the writings and committed land stewardship of renowned author, scientist and conservationist Aldo Leopold. In his famous *A Sand County Almanac*, Leopold wrote, "the landscape of any farm is the owner's portrait of himself." Sand County Foundation's Leopold Conservation Awards honor outstanding landowners who believe in and live by the tenets of Leopold's land ethic. That is, a land ethic changes the role of people from conquerors of the land-community to members and citizens of it. "It implies respect for his fellow-members and also respect for the community as such," Leopold wrote.

The Leopold Conservation Award® Program recognizes and celebrates extraordinary achievement in voluntary conservation by private landowners who inspire others by their examples. It provides a platform to elevate leading agricultural families as conservation ambassadors to citizens outside of agriculture. In addition, the program builds bridges between agriculture, government, environmental organizations, industry and academia to help advance the cause of private lands conservation.

Working with prominent state conservation partners in ten states, Sand County Foundation presents the \$10,000 award and a crystal depicting Aldo Leopold, in settings that publicly showcase the landowners' achievements.

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 or sustainable funding.

Leopold Conservation Award Program sponsors are proud to be affiliated with a program that gives exceptional stewards of natural resources the recognition they deserve.

For more information, please visit: www.leopoldconservationaward.org

BUILDING THE FOUNDATION OF CONSERVATION LEADERSHIP FROM THE GROUND UP



Land management decisions that are bad for the soil are also bad for the nation's economy. Aldo Leopold recognized that axiom while he lived through the "Dust Bowl" era.

The wholesale public expenditures for 1933 indicate that from now on, whenever a private landowner so uses his land as to injure the public interest, either by buying him out, or by donating the repairs, the public will eventually pay the bill or both. Hence the prevention of damage to the soil, or to the living thin upon it, has become a first principle of public finance. Abuse is no longer merely a question of depleting a capital asset, but of actually creating a cash liability against the taxpayer. Conservation Economics – 1934

Where healthy soil abounds, resilient and productive land is abundant, too

So, in what has been proclaimed internationally as the "Year of Soils", the positive examples of farmers producing healthier soils while they produce healthy crops are important to recognize because they enhance the farm, give us environmental benefits and lower risks of draining our tax dollars unnecessarily.

In this annual review of our 2015 Leopold Conservation Award® recipients, we share with you examples of successful adaptation to the constraints of land. We hope these examples show how even difficult topography and sensitive vegetation, with foresight and flexibility, can be managed capably with attention to the soil.

With our partners, Sand County Foundation offers the Leopold Conservation Award® Program in a growing number of states. We identify, recognize, honor and celebrate leaders in conservation agriculture. Their outstanding land stewardship provides the nutritious food, clean water, wildlife habitat and open spaces we all depend on. And all of those outcomes depend on soil.

With Leopold Conservation Award families, now more than eighty strong, we can show that privately-owned "working landscapes and soils" are loved no less, and nurtured far more, than many of the lands and soils which the public considers wild. It is an ethic that these families have in common, even though their circumstances and crops differ. Each is committed to nourishing the soil.

It's our hope that these stories give you even more reason to appreciate the land that supports production of the food that reaches your table. I ask you to take a moment to thank landowners who commit themselves to environmental improvement. The Leopold Conservation Award recipients we celebrate produce healthy crops and livestock because they are investing in the very foundation of their business...the soil.

Sincerely,

Brent M. Haglund, Ph.D.
Executive Chairman

CALIFORNIA

★ PRATHER RANCH
Jim and Mary Rickert



Photo credit: Paolo Vescia



★ PRATHER RANCH
Macdoel, California



JIM AND MARY RICKERT have worked in production agriculture all of their lives, developing a deep love for the land and wildlife on the many acres they manage. Hired in 1979 by the original owner of Prather Ranch, the Rickerts have responsibly managed the land and recently became majority owners. Under their care, Prather Ranch has grown from 3,000 acres of pasture, hay and timberland, to over 35,000 acres.

Originally a commercial cow/calf ranch, Prather Ranch has transitioned to a vertically integrated beef business that includes the beef herd, a feed yard, processing facility and retail meat outlets. During this transition, the Rickerts developed a closed herd to fulfill the requirements of biomedical companies to supply the highest quality biomedical grade collagen, pituitary glands and tendons for medical use.

Intensive grazing has been practiced on the ranch for many years, increasing plant diversity to include a mix of nitrogen-fixing legumes and natural grass species that have improved productivity without the use of applied fertilizers. As a result of the Rickert's intensive grazing and improvements in irrigation efficiencies, the carrying capacity of the rangelands and pastures have more than doubled over the last 30 years.

The Rickerts' grazing practices mimic the native herbivores on their land. In the summer, the cattle graze the mountains when it is cooler in the Alpine area. During the winter the cattle are moved to the more Mediterranean-like Sacramento Valley foothills. This pattern allows the cattle to graze year-round and protects the land in the off-season.

Humane treatment of their animals is a cornerstone of the ranch's core values, and is of great importance to their beef customers. The ranch was certified in 2003 by an organization that promotes the humane treatment of livestock, and also undergoes annual audits to ensure the animals are being humanely raised and harvested.

"The Rickerts have taken an extraordinarily active role in California's ranching community and have been leaders in proactive stewardship of the state's land, water and wildlife resources," says Billy Flournoy, President of California Cattlemen's Association. "They focus their time and efforts on sound conservation practices in order to keep ranching viable in California."

- ★ CALIFORNIA RECIPIENTS

- ★ 2014
FULL BELLY FARM
Andrew Brait, Paul Muller, Judith Redmond and Dru Rivers
- ★ 2013
GIACOMINI DAIRY
Bob, Karen, Diana, Lynn and Jill Giacomini
- ★ 2012
GIACOMAZZI DAIRY
Dino and Julie Giacomazzi
- ★ 2011
KOOPMANN RANCH
Tim Koopmann
- ★ 2010
MONTNA FARMS
Al Montna
- ★ 2009
RED ROCK RANCH
John Diener
- ★ 2008
THREE CREEKS RANCH
Chet Vogt
- ★ 2007
SIERRA ORCHARDS
Craig and Julie McNamara
- ★ 2006
LANGETWINS WINE ESTATES
Brad and Randy Lange

COLORADO

★ FLYING DIAMOND RANCH *Johnson Family*



Photo credit: Lisa Sowell, Tri-State G&T



★ FLYING DIAMOND RANCH
Steamboat Springs, Colorado



For over 100 years, the **JOHNSON FAMILY's** philosophy has been to leave resources under their stewardship in better condition than when they found them, and to pass their ranch on to the next generation.

Located near Kit Carson, Flying Diamond Ranch is now in its fifth generation and the family is determined to pass it on to the sixth.

Scott Johnson and his family own and manage 25,000 acres of land dominated by shortgrass and sandsage prairie, and over ten miles of riparian area along Big Sandy and Horse Creek.

After attending a Holistic Resource seminar in the 1980s, Scott decided to make holism a central tenet to the ranch management philosophy. The Johnsons now look at the ranch as a whole and strive to achieve a balanced approach to how they manage the land.

In partnership with NRCS, they implemented a rotational grazing system supported by an extensive pipeline and fencing infrastructure to reach the levels of range improvement they need. Such practices have led to improved production levels, health and fertility in their land and cattle.

Using their digital data library, the Johnsons can identify variations in historical averages, allowing them to quantify grass deficits and surpluses while responsibly adjusting their stocking rates.

Rather than beginning their calving season in March, they start in May when the natural forage supplies meet the nutritional needs of their cattle. This reduces the need to supplement forage and decreases calf deaths due to inclement weather. The later start also benefits wildlife; there is no need to hunt coyotes because they have access to other food sources and are no longer a threat to livestock.

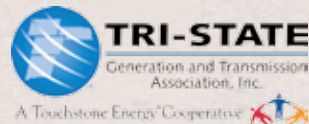
The Johnsons deeply believe in their duty serve the greater agricultural community. Each family member has held agricultural leadership roles or is heavily involved in promoting agriculture in the community. The ranch sponsors the Catch-a-Calf contest at the National Western Stock Show and supports rural youth through their regularly hosted ranch visits for local schools.

“Flying Diamond Ranch has demonstrated a multi-generational commitment to the conservation and protection of its most important assets: grassland and water,” wrote William Hammerich, CEO of the Colorado Livestock Association. “Their holistic approach to stewardship is one that could serve as a model for all livestock producers.”

★ COLORADO ★ RECIPIENTS

- ★ 2014
TURKEY CREEK RANCH
Walker Family
- ★ 2013
VISINTAINER SHEEP CO.
Dean and Gary Visintainer
- ★ 2012
WINEINGER-DAVIS RANCH
Russell and Tricia Davis
- ★ 2011
PIPE SPRINGS RANCH
McEndree Family
- ★ 2010
STANKO RANCH
Jim and Jo Stanko
- ★ 2009
MESA DE MAYA RANCH
John and Carolyn Doherty
- ★ 2008
COLEMAN RANCH
Jim, Frances, Tim and Teddi Coleman
- ★ 2007
SAN ISABEL RANCH
Mike and Sara Shields, Bet Kettle
- ★ 2006
BOHART RANCH
Dick and Sandra Tanner
- ★ 2005
MCNEIL RANCH
Mike and Cathy McNeil
- ★ 2004
RUSK HERFORD RANCH
Randy and Claricy Rusk
- ★ 2003
CAPPS RANCH
Frankie and Sue Menegatti

★ PRESENTED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



KANSAS

INAUGURAL AWARD

★ SPROUL RANCH *Sproul Family*



Photo provided by the Sproul family



After growing up on a small dairy farm, **BILL SPROUL** dreamed of one day owning his own cattle ranch. With the support of his family, Bill purchased the land that is now Sproul Ranch, and manages cattle with his wife Peggy and their son Raymond.

Located on 2,200-acres in the transition zone between the Chautauqua and Flint Hills, Sproul Ranch sits on the last landscape expression of tall grass prairie. When the Sprouls purchased the land, it was overgrazed and was rapidly being overtaken by invasive woody plants. After removing nearly 30,000 trees in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and adjusting cattle stocking rates to a sustainable level, the restored native tall grass prairie began to thrive.

The Sprouls closely monitor prairie productivity on their ranch. When a recent drought hit, Bill significantly cut his stocking rates to allow the prairie to recover over the course of a few years. In some areas, Bill deferred grazing altogether. When asked about his approach to conservation, Bill said, "I always let the prairie dictate what I do."

Rather than perform annual burns on every acre, Bill uses patchburn grazing, where a third of his pasture is annually burned on a rotational basis. This burn schedule helps to make sure groundnesting birds have suitable habitat and sufficient ground cover.

While his livestock grazes burned patches, vegetation accumulates in the unburned area for wildlife. Bill continually seeks to understand and enhance the ecological community on his land. Working with the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism, Bill has conducted annual breeding bird surveys for the past eight years. To survey pollinators on his land, Bill invited Kansas State University's entomologists to study the effect of patch-burn grazing on pollinator populations. Bill also installed nest boxes for barn owls for natural rodent control.

"Watching, interacting, and listening to Bill leaves you with the understanding that he believes the plants, soil, livestock, wildlife, insects, neighbors, and of course himself, are all in this community together. Each just as important as the other," said David Kraft, State Rangeland Management Specialist, USDA.

★ PRESENTED IN
PARTNERSHIP WITH



KENTUCKY

★ WEST WIND FARM

Charlie Williams



★ KENTUCKY ★ RECIPIENTS

★ 2014
SPRINGHILL FARMS
The Peery Family

★ 2013
SHERWOOD ACRES
FARMS
Jon & Sylvia Bednarski

To many in Munfordville, **CHARLIE WILLIAMS** is simply known as “the tree man.” From a young age, Charlie developed a passion for woodland stewardship after he received 90 acres of land from his grandfather for Christmas. He has nurtured and expanded his landholdings into 1,200 acres, including over 1,000 acres of woodlands.

As he accumulated his land, some tracts were littered with concrete slabs, old tractor parts and appliances. He removed the debris and replaced it with trees, clover and fescue. In the old tobacco fields, Charlie planted warm season grasses, providing habitat for quail, rabbits and songbirds. Through an easement agreement with a local electric cooperative, Charlie planted Swamp Milkweed for monarch butterfly habitat. He also allows deer and turkey hunting on his land to prevent damage from overpopulation.

While providing habitat for the wildlife above ground, Charlie also contributes to the care for wildlife underground, as some of his land sits above caves. After selling off cattle and eliminating the tobacco crop, fertilizer, lime and chemicals no longer drained into the caves. This resulted in a better environment for cave dwellers and improved the quality of the cave drainage into the Green River.

Seeking to reverse 200 years of top-grading, which occurs when loggers remove the most valuable tree species such as walnut and white oak, Charlie became the first person in Kentucky to bottomgrade woodlands. In this approach, he only harvests dying, fire-damaged or poor quality trees, improving the health and vitality of the remaining trees. This method has received acclaim from his peers within the forestry industry.

Charlie welcomes those who want to learn more about the value of woodland conservation. He has hosted over 4,000 forestry field days for children, undergraduates and business people seeking to learn more about woodlands. During the summer, he provides employment for high school and college students, teaching them to identify, plant and prune trees.

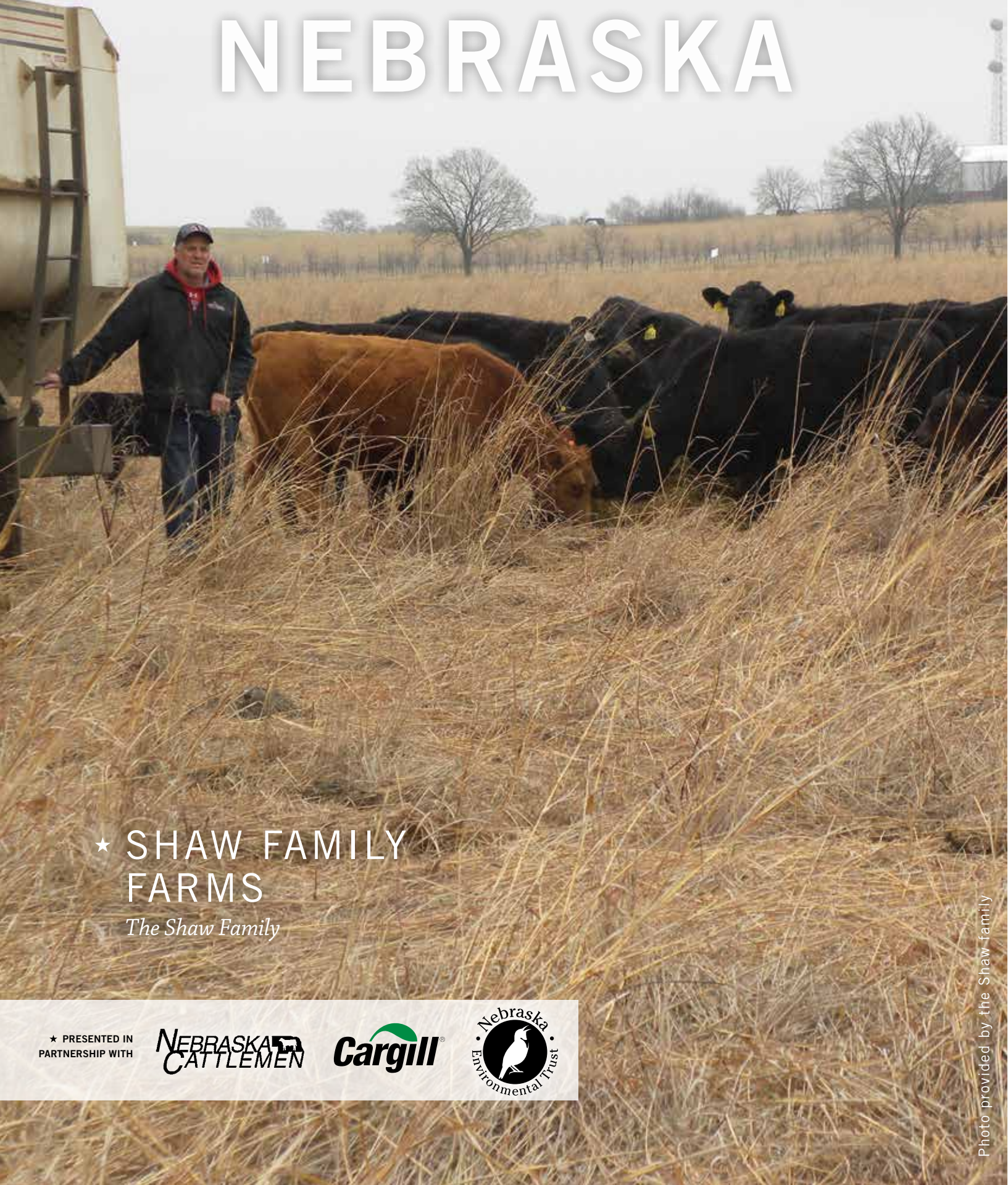
“With regard to conservation, I know of no one who more embodies commitment to a Land Ethic than Charlie,” said Dr. Todd Willian, Professor of Agriculture, Western Kentucky University. “His involvement with nature conservancy will one day undoubtedly be his most lasting legacy to his community and the Commonwealth.”

Photo credit: University of Kentucky

★ PRESENTED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



NEBRASKA



★ SHAW FAMILY FARMS

The Shaw Family

★ PRESENTED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



Photo provided by the Shaw family



★ SHAW FAMILY FARMS
Clay, Nebraska

Nestled in the heart of Nebraska's Rainwater Basin is SHAW FAMILY FARMS, a fifth generation row-crop and cattle ranch owned and managed by Steve and Vicki Shaw and their son and daughter-in-law Brian and Julie Shaw.

The Shaw's belief is that they have been successful "not just because of hard work, but also because of the land ethic passed down from the first generation."

The Rainwater Basin is 99% privately owned and primarily cultivated for row-crop production. For most landowners in this area, the opportunity for land expansion is remote. This led the Shaws to partner with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, so they could graze public lands. These relationships taught the Shaws about the benefits of wildlife management, and in turn, they had the opportunity to teach their partners about farm management. Steve and Brian are keen to share experiences about working with public land managers and how those relationships can benefit landowners and the environment.

As the Shaws began grazing public lands, they saw opportunity in integrating wetlands and grasslands into their farm, and decided to purchase a restored wetland and grassland tract. Although the USFWS holds an easement on the property, the Shaws can freely graze the tract while also providing an invaluable

migration path for the estimated 8.6 million waterfowl and 300,000 shorebirds that rely on the landscape.

The success of grazing wetlands led them to restore wetlands and transition parts of their land to irrigated grassland. To maximize production potential they developed pivot irrigation systems and planted diverse mixes of grass and forb species that provide a reliable source of forage. They have also diversified their herds so that they can graze wetlands and grasslands at different times depending on the dietary needs of the each herd.

The Shaws also developed a comprehensive nutrient management plan that includes conservation plans for 2,200 crop acres, establishment of grassland filter strips, pest management and conservation tillage. The farming and irrigation management practices the Shaws have implemented have allowed them to improve soil quality, decrease irrigation inputs, improve management of manure, and reduce fertilizer and soil additives.

"Steve, Brian, and their families are hard workers, honest, always willing to give back, continually learning, and desirous of being good stewards of the land" wrote Jenny Rees, UNL Extension Educator, in her nomination letter. "They are very humble and lead by example through their character."

★ NEBRASKA RECIPIENTS

★ 2014
PELSTER ANGUS RANCH
Pelster Family

★ 2013
BEEL RANCH
Beel Family

★ 2012
SHOVEL DOT RANCH
Buell Family

★ 2011
RGM Corporation
Mathewson Family

★ 2010
KALKOWSKI FAMILY RANCHES
Kalkowski Family

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

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

★ 2007
CHRISTEN RANCH
Rod and Amy Christen

★ 2006
WILSON RANCH
Blaine and Bryan Wilson

SOUTH DAKOTA



★ JORGENSEN LAND AND CATTLE PARTNERSHIP

Jorgensen Family

★ PRESENTED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



Photo credit: Colette Kessler, USDA NRCS South Dakota



★ JORGENSEN LAND AND CATTLE PARTNERSHIP
Ideal, South Dakota

★ SOUTH DAKOTA RECIPIENTS

- ★ 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

The Jorgensens have made a living from farming and ranching for more than 100 years. Humbly beginning as a small family farm, **JORGENSEN LAND AND CATTLE PARTNERSHIP** has grown to include livestock, a large variety of crops and a hunting business.

The Jorgensen family owns and manages the fourth generation ranch with land health foremost in their minds. They believe they have a responsibility to continually care for and improve their greatest asset, the soil.

The Jorgensens manage 850 head of cattle and grow 10,000 acres of non-irrigated crops such as spring and winter wheat, corn and grass hay. One of their biggest obstacles is the limited rainfall in South Dakota. To combat this, the family developed crop rotations based on the intensity of water use. They have also been no-till since 1991 and have seen dramatic reductions in wind and water erosion as a result.

Some of the other conservation practices they have implemented include planting cover crops, frequently moving their cattle to improve forage stands, and installing fresh water sources in their pastures to increase herd health and efficiency.

Over the past 25 years, the Jorgensens have evolved their soil management practices to benefit the soil and crops. Rather than applying fertilizer directly on the soil surface based on the assumption of the crop's needs, the Jorgensens now use tools for soil monitoring and efficient nutrient applications. To evaluate their efficiency, they use GPS tools to collect data on applications and their harvest.

It's clear that the family does not shy away from sharing their experiences and expertise with others. The Jorgensens have assisted several other farmers with crop nutrient and soil management. The family has also worked with South Dakota State University for many years and regularly host farm tours.

"Jorgensen Land and Cattle has been, and is currently, a leader in their area with the use of no-till, crop rotation and cover crops," says Neal Foster, South Dakota Crop Improvement Association. "Their ranch is in one of the more fragile land areas and they have recognized the need to maintain the land for their use and for future generations."

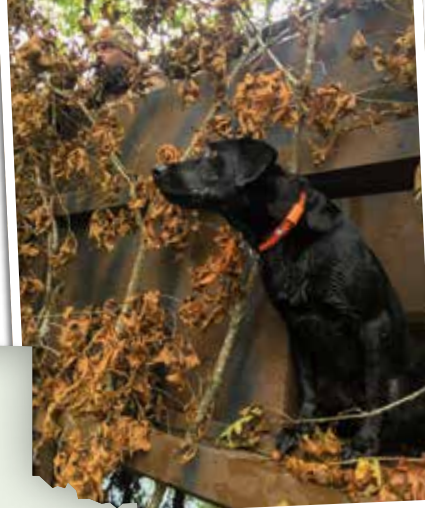
TEXAS

★ THE BIGWOODS ON THE TRINITY

Dr. Robert McFarlane



Photo credit: Earl Nottingham, Texas Parks & Wildlife



★ TEXAS ★ RECIPIENTS

- ★ 2014
WINSTON 8 RANCH
Winston Family
- ★ 2013
BUCKHOLLOW AND STOCKARD-SIRIANNI RANCHES
Jack and Jan Cato
- ★ 2012
COOK'S BRANCH CONSERVANCY
Mitchell Family
- ★ 2011
TEMPLE RANCH
Buddy & Ellen Temple
- ★ 2010
ANDERSON RANCH
Jim Bill Anderson
- ★ 2009
SELAH, BAMBERGER RANCH PRESERVE
J. David Bamberger
- ★ 2008
LLANO SPRINGS RANCH
The Vandivier Family
- ★ 2007
77 RANCH
Gary and Sue Price
- ★ 2006
TREADWELL BRADY RANCH
John and Brian Treadwell
- ★ 2005
RICHARDS RANCH
John and Brent Hackley

DR. ROBERT MCFARLANE spent his youth hunting and fishing the lands and waters of the Middle Trinity River near Tennessee Colony. Those memories of the land stayed with him when he left for medical school at Harvard. When he returned, he saw a different landscape.

It was fragmented, converted to pasture and farmland, and significantly different from the pristine land he remembered. Determined to return the land to its former glory, Dr. McFarlane purchased the first 1,500 acres of The BigWoods on the Trinity in 1995. Today, he has expanded that to 7,500 acres composed of bottomland hardwood, nearly 2,500 acres of restored savanna and a total of 25 different wetlands spanning 500 acres.

The main conservation emphasis at The BigWoods is emergent wetland and bottomland hardwood restoration and management. The wetlands are intensively managed to attract waterfowl and wetland-dependent bird species, and the filtration capabilities of the vegetation has vastly improved water quality.

To defray maintenance costs and increase long-term sustainability, Dr. McFarlane created a wetland mitigation bank and established a commercial hunting

operation. The mitigation bank generates income from payments made for offsetting negative environmental impacts to water. The hunting operation generates substantial income due to the significant interest in hunting the waterfowl, deer and feral hogs.

The exceptional bird attraction to the land makes The BigWoods a premier spot for birding, and it's cited as one of the best places in Texas to view colorful neotropical migratory birds. Although quail and turkey are not yet frequent visitors, Dr. McFarlane is working to implement practices that will draw both species to the property.

An avid contributor to his community, Dr. McFarlane has hosted several tours and events at The BigWoods to demonstrate the importance of conservation. He recently opened his doors to allow 25 high school kids stay for six days to learn about waterfowl biology and conservation management.

It's clear that this land made an early impression on Dr. McFarlane. Thanks to his love for the land and his passion for stewardship, children and adults alike have the opportunity to create their own unforgettable memories of the Trinity River.



UTAH

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



★
W. F. GORING & SON, INC.
Deweyville, Utah

LEOPOLD CONSERVATION AWARD



★ UTAH ★ RECIPIENTS

★ 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

Near the west side of the Wellsville Mountains is **GORING RANCH**, a third generation sheep outfit owned and managed by Bill Goring, his wife Sherie and their son Blake. Bill attributes his family's good fortune in the business to the hands-on approach and strong initiative passed down from his father, who built the ranch from scratch.

Early on, Bill and his father recognized the need to be involved in organizations that saw livestock as a management tool to maintain healthy ranges and sustainable forage resources. Goring Ranch has been involved with organizations such as USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service and Farm Service Agency to improve and responsibly develop the rangeland for the benefit of the ranch and the environment. Bill credits those organizations for helping the family best apply their time and money.

Like many of their ranching neighbors, the Gorings have had to contend with drought. Their recently-completed water system is comprised of 20 miles of pipeline, 34 troughs, a well, generated power lift stations and 10 storage tanks. It provides individual watering sources

to all 13 pastures on their lambing grounds. To control soil erosion and conserve water for their sheep, the Gorings terraced all of their dry farm area and built water impoundments.

Recent droughts have increased the likelihood of future reductions in allowed grazing on Bureau of Land Management lands. Due to their sustainable approach to range management, the Gorings estimate they could withstand a 50% reduction in the amount of grazing on BLM land and still sustain their current sheep numbers.

Being sensitive to sage-grouse and upland game birds on their land, the Gorings burned and mechanically removed strips of forage brush on 1,800 acres so that the natural forage can thrive. They also re-seeded these areas with grasses to benefit the birds and sheep.

"The Gorings have created an example of the critical balance between economic, ecologic and social sustainability in their management of resources. The land resources, wildlife, watersheds and rural communities where the Gorings operate are all blessed by their presence," said Bill Hopkin, Director, Utah Grazing Improvement Program.

Photo credit: Reynaldo Leal, USDA NRCS Utah

★ PRESENTED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



WISCONSIN

★ WISCONSIN RECIPIENTS



★ MEUER FARM
Meuer Family

★ PRESENTED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



Photo provided by the Meuer family



DAVID MEUER considers himself lucky to have been introduced to conservation practices through his father, who saw value in investing in the health of the land. When David purchased his own land and took over his father's farm, he continued to uphold the conservation ethic his dad instilled in him.

Along with his wife Leslie, David manages a remarkably diverse 150-acre farm, just east of Lake Winnebago in Chilton. Their farm consists of beef cattle, egg layers, bees, pumpkins, strawberry fields, row crops and grains.

The Meuers have always worked with the land rather than against it. The cattle are grass-fed and rotationally grazed on 30 acres of sloping pastures. Relying on the stream running through their land to provide water for their cows, they installed stream bank fencing to help hold the soil in place and keep the water clean as it empties into Lake Winnebago.

The natural springs in their pond are used in their drip irrigation for strawberries, reducing their water use by 40% and eliminating the need for a high-capacity well for overhead irrigation.

Recognizing the value in sharing space with wildlife, the Meuers converted one of their crop fields into a food plot for wildlife. David attributes the food plot as the reason why they lost no deer or turkey during a particularly frigid winter recently.

Tapping the sugar maples on their farm has resulted in a robust maple syrup business. They have also begun harvesting puffball and morel mushrooms, wild plums and black walnuts from trees planted by David over 30 years ago.

A unique aspect of their farm is their heavy emphasis on agritourism. More than 30,000 people from all over the country visit Meuer Farm each year to learn about farming and challenge their sense of direction in the corn maze. The Meuers also host farm-totable dinners during the summer months and bring in local chefs to prepare meals featuring produce grown on the farm.

"If Aldo Leopold himself had ever met David or his father, I firmly believe he would have been impressed by their quiet, persistent passion and land ethic," said Rock Anderson, retired Calumet County Conservationist.

★ 2014
HERRICKS DAIRY FARM
Herrick Family

★ 2013
CATES FAMILY FARM
Dick & Kim Cates

★ 2012
HEBBE FAMILY FARM
Jim & Val Hebbe

★ 2011
BRAGGER FAMILY DAIRY
Joe & Noel Bragger

★ 2011
KOEPKER FARMS INC.
Koepke Family

★ 2008
TERRY PETERS*

★ 2006
GERRY MICH*

* Presented in partnership with the Great Lakes Timber Professionals Association

WYOMING



★ KING RANCH
Eisele Family

★ PRESENTED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



Photo provided by the Eisele family



★ WYOMING ★ RECIPIENTS

- ★ 2014
LADDER RANCH
O'Toole Family
- ★ 2013
PADLOCK RANCH
Sommers Family
- ★ 2012
SOMMERS RANCH
Sommers Family
- ★ 2011
FIELDGROVE RANCH
Ryan & Teresa Fieldgrove
- ★ 2010
7E RANCH
Ron and Linda Heward
- ★ 2009
FOY RANCH
Rocky and Nancy Foy
- ★ 2008
PAPE RANCH
Norm and Barbara Pape
- ★ 2007
GOLDEN WILLOW RANCH
Paul and Catherine Kukowski
- ★ 2006
BARLOW LIVESTOCK, INC.
Glenn and Joy Barlow

The century-old **KING RANCH** sits just outside of Cheyenne. After the passing of one of the ranch owners, the ranch management was left in the hands of Mark Eisele, who has worked on the ranch since the 1970s. Today, Mark, along with his wife Trudy and their family, proudly carry on the ranching tradition at King Ranch.

The Eiseles run three herds of primarily red and black Angus, and manage a portion of the land as alfalfa and native grass hay fields. Dedicated to business and environmental sustainability, the Eiseles converted to low-pressure pivot irrigation, which reduced water costs by 60% and consumption by 25%. The Eiseles use solar and electric submersible pumps in their windmills to reduce, and in some cases eliminate, their need to haul water around the ranch.

The ranch partially depends on grazing access near the Medicine Bow National Forest, a popular destination for tourists. Its close proximity to an urban area makes King Ranch rather unique compared to more rural ranches. As a result, the Eiseles must balance the park's and city's needs, as well as their own.

The Eiseles work closely with the US Forest Service so recreation and ranching in and near the park can co-exist. Mark constructed gates and fences along trails so bicyclists can enjoy riding through the idyllic pastures. The ranch also includes land designated as suitable habitat for two threatened species – the Preble's meadow jumping mouse and the Colorado butterfly plant. To help improve their habitat, ranch management practices are regularly reviewed with wildlife in mind.

Mark's commitment to conservation is exemplified by his willingness to host research projects and students on the ranch. He recently volunteered a portion of his land for a trial experiment to use sludge from a water treatment plant as a soil amendment, and he enjoys educating children about the value of ranching and conservation.

"Mark is one of the most progressive ranchers in the state and region, always having a creative eye on the future but with his feet dependably planted on the ground of the present," said Tom Farrell, Laramie County Conservation District. "His love and care for the land is always foremost in the decisions he makes."



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- ALDO LEOPOLD
A SAND COUNTY ALMANAC

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SAND COUNTY FOUNDATION | 131 WEST WILSON STREET | SUITE 610 | MADISON, WI 53703 | (608) 663-4605

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