



## STEWARDS OF THE LAND

*Caring for our land and natural resources comes second nature to these Angus producers. For their efforts, they have been named our 1992 land Stewardship Award winners.*

*The Earth and its resources are not gifts from our ancestors, but a loan from our children.*

*This Native American proverb holds a lot of truth, especially for today's environmental-conscious society.*

*For America's farmers and ranchers, it has deeper meaning. They are reminded of it daily — whenever a new crop is planted, cattle are moved to fresh pasture, or children play in a creek and cast a fishing pole into a pond.*

*To help spread the message that beef producers do care about their land, resources and wildlife, we asked our readers, along with conservationists and Extension ag agents, to nominate and write an essay on an Angus producer they felt was a true steward of the land. You responded with an impressive 17 nominations from 12 states.*

*Serving as judges for this third annual award program were Peter Jackson, executive vice president of the Society for Range Management, Denver; Ken Vogel, forage specialist, USDA Agricultural Research Service, University of Nebraska, Lincoln; and Lawrason Sayre from Waffle Hill Farm, Churchville, Md., who was our 1991 Land Stewardship East Region winner. The judges evaluated the entries on conservation practices, environmental awareness and educational efforts, plus a written essay.*

*"Good land stewardship benefits everyone," said Ken Vogel. "I was impressed by the conservation and stewardship activities of all the nominees."*

*Judge Peter Jackson added, "The 17 entries were outstanding. They were all good enough to win any contest."*

*It was a tough decision, but winners from four regions of the United States — West, Central, East and South — were selected. These winners will each receive \$100, an engraved plaque and will serve as spokespersons.*

*An award program such as this is the least we can do to recognize the people who make it possible for the next generation to make their living from the land.*

— Jerilyn Johnson



**WEST WINNER**

*Tom Elliott*

*N-Bar Land & Cattle Co.  
Grass Range, Montana*

In 1885 a swath of grassy meadows and forested ridges surrounding a fine trout stream flowing out of the Little Snowy Mountains in central Montana became something other than open range; it became property.

Two years later, this property became a ranch when the absentee owner, a prominent businessman from the state capital of Helena, more than 200 miles to the west, purchased the remnants of a large cattle herd that had been decimated during the disastrous winter of 1886-87.

Absentee ownership — combined with sometimes excellent, sometimes mediocre on-site management— was the rule for most of the N-Bar's first century as a cattle and sometimes sheep operation.

Then in the early 1980s, a member of the Elliott family — owners of N-Bar since December 1963 — moved onto the ranch to take a more direct hand in its fate.

Tom Elliott continued the N-Bar's program of producing Angus cattle and fed steers, along with forages for winter feed, but he also diversified the ranch. N-Bar bottomland fields now produce wheat, barley, oats, buckwheat, flax, clover, black medic, potatoes and other garden crops.

Moreover, Tom has gradually weaned the ranch from dependence on chemical fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides. Most of the cattle and all of the crops are officially certified as organic. Soil fertility is maintained with livestock manures; green manure crops such as clover and black medic, which are plowed down; and time-tested crop rotations.

Today the N-Bar includes 40,000 acres of deeded rangeland and 3,000 acres of deeded farmland. The ranch has irrigated and sub-irrigated bottomlands, grassy benches, and hills with mixed grassy meadows and pine, fir and aspen forest. The elevation varies from 4,000 to 5,500-plus feet. The soil is loam, clay-loam and sandy-loam, with 3 to 4 percent humus content.

Sensitive stewardship of the land shows up in many other ways. Careful, selective logging has replaced the damaging clear-cut methods used time to time in the past. An abundance of elk, white-tail and mule deer, pronghorn antelope, turkeys, many year-round and migratory birds, occasional bear and mountain lion, and many other fur-bearing animals thrive here due to the ranch's conservation programs.

Hunting and fishing are carefully regulated. Hunting is limited to guided fee hunters. Fishing (there is excellent fly fishing on Flatwillow Creek) is open to the public on a first-come, first-serve sign-up basis.

An innovative program that is providing a model for other ranches in the region is the N-Bar's approach to controlling an invasive, non-native and troublesome noxious weed called leafy spurge. The ranch no longer declares war on this weed, no longer sprays it with expensive and dangerous chemicals, but instead has made peace by turning it into nutritious feed for some 3,000 sheep. The N-Bar also has introduced a natural insect predator of leafy spurge as an additional biological control.

The N-Bar frequently functions as an outdoor education center. Over the years, Elliott has hosted workshops on sustainable agriculture and renewable energy run by a citizen's group called the Alternative Energy Resources Organization. He also served on AERO's board.

Elliott is working with another local group to initiate a pilot ranch waste management program emphasizing the three R's: reduce, reuse and recycle.

*Nominator: Wilbur Wood, Roundup, Montana*

**WEST HONORABLE MENTION**

Greg Gould, Seven Bar Heart Ranches, Ulm, Mont.

J. Henry Winterholler, Snake River Angus, Wendell, Idaho

Frank Mehling, Medicine Rocks Ranch, Willard, Mont.

Scott & Carol Shively, Oak Lane Farm, Pleasant Lake, N.D.



**CENTRAL WINNER**

*Bruce & Scott Foster*

*Seldom Rest Farms  
Niles, Michigan*

Land Stewardship is a way of life on these acres. Soil testing, liming and returning nutrients to the soil to preserve and enhance fertility are necessities for the Fosters.

Although this is a family operation which has overlapped five generations, Bruce and Scott are entrusted to carry on and improve land stewardship.

Michigan has a new Right-to-Farm Act designed to preserve, protect and improve our natural resources. This new era of conservation compliance is meaningful, necessary and rewarding.

The Fosters control water to walk off, not run. Sod water-

ways and diversions have been installed, along with sod strips, erosion control structures with baffles, a catch basin (water retention) with standpipe and dike, sod orchard floor and trees planted on hillsides to aid in erosion control.

Minimum till and no-till crop tillage are common practices on the farms. Approximately 30 to 50 percent of the high density crop residue is left to prevent soil erosion and retain soil moisture. Conservation tillage reduces equipment trips over the fields and conserves fuel, time and tire efficiency. It also lessens soil compaction.

Soil is not tilled in the fall after crops are harvested, thus aiding erosion control, reducing run-off and holding rain and snow moisture. When needed, monitored irrigation units are pressed into service as an integral part of quality crop management.

Herbicide and pesticide conservation are of paramount importance. The Fosters consult with chemical experts, then calculate and monitor chemical applications on crops and fruit trees. Certified pesticide and chemical licensed operators, they value field notebook records which are transferred to the farm office computer. They use herbicides and pesticides that allow good economic return while being environmentally safe.

Additional practices include pest and residue scouting, crop rotation and alternative chemical application technologies to prevent over-application, drift and leeching. Animal and people-minded protection when applying chemicals is of highest regard.

The Fosters live in a highly populated area with nearby lakes and streams, so special attention is paid to waste management and control. Crop rotation and monitored manure application, including soil testing, are standard practices. All manure produced is returned to the fields. Animal confinement facility waste is controlled by using a cement floor barnyard lot, 600,000-gallon Slurrystor liquid manure storage, a 2-acre waste water lagoon and high tensile fences for cattle pasture rotation.

Forage management includes total energy efficient and quality equipment handling of the alfalfa hay program. Field crop rotation is practiced for better yields and to prevent erosion. Only the best alfalfa hybrids suited to the area are planted.

Alternative energy is making its presence known in the area. The Fosters sell a good portion of their corn to the New Energy ethanol plant in nearby South Bend, Ind. They have plans to convert vehicles to ethanol use.

Recycling is a normal practice at Seldom Rest Farms. Seedlings of trees native to the region are planted in wooded areas. Chemical containers, along with metal, paper and glass, are recycled. They use straw, sawdust and bark for cattle bedding. Water is pumped from the ponds for irrigation. Idle fields are kept mowed. The Township Park Commission was allowed to deposit sediment on their farm while dredging a park waterway.

Wildlife habitat is a natural in and around the 40-acre lake and in the outlying areas with borders consisting of bushes and trees purchased from the Soil Conservation Service. Deer, waterfowl and dozens of other wildlife species inhabit the farms' wooded areas.

Cattle producers must continue to educate themselves in this age of commercialization, high technology, and chemical and biological engineering. There still remains an unchanged and very important area — personal touch. We live in a rapidly changing world with an underlying dependence upon American agriculture for food and fiber.

Public awareness and education are and have been an integral part of the Fosters' farming enterprises. Programs on farming have been presented to 4-H clubs, as well as the Lions Club, Rotary International, Optimist and other city clubs. Thousands of

grade school children have visited the milking parlor, Angus beef pens and apple orchards, often accompanied by newspaper and farm magazine reporters. Many school children brought their parents for return visits. Farm tours for city friends are also popular. In addition, they have snowmobile trails and hayrides for the public and a supervised self-policed hunter's club.

Bruce and Scott hold American FFA Farmer Degrees. Both serve on the ASCS Township committees, 4-H Foundation, Youth Fair Board and Michigan Angus Association Board.

The Fosters are thankful to those before them who preserved the land and mindful that we must preserve and enrich it for future generations.

*Nominator: John and D'nec Jorgensen, Berrien Springs, Mich.*

#### **CENTRAL HONORABLE MENTION**

LaVern Koupal, Koupals Angus, Dante, S.D.  
Martin Viersen, Viersen Ranch, North Platte, Neb.  
Dennis Youngerberg, Springfield, Minn.  
Howard & JoAnne Hillman, Bon View Farms, Canova, S.D.



#### **SOUTH WINNER**

**W.B. Herrington**  
*Bilmar Angus Farms*  
*Mt. Calm, Texas*

"Whatever a man sows, this he shall also reap."

This is the stewardship commitment of W.B. and Mary Lee Herrington of Bilmar Angus Farms. The Herringtons have worked reclaiming land and conserving soil and water since buying their first Black Land Prairie farm 12 years ago.

Bilmar Angus consists of two farms totaling 498 acres. The farms are located in the Black Land Prairie of central Texas near Waco. The terrain is rolling prairie with primarily heavy Black Land soil.

The Herringtons manage a herd of 40 Angus cows. Their future goal is to increase herd size to 100 mature cows. The farm produces enough forage and coastal bermuda hay that feed purchases are limited to mineral and grain supplements during cold winter days. Approximately 150 acres are planted in wheat and milo.

The Soil Conservation Service has supplied the technical engineering advice for all the soil and water conservation practices and financial help for some of the programs.

The Herringtons set aside 25 percent of their Angus cattle operation income for conservation and reclaiming dense brush and mesquite land for productive pasture.

Recent conservation projects completed at Bilmar Angus Farms include 70 acres of mesquite land put into permanent pasture, four stock tanks for water and erosion control, seven acres of coastal bermuda waterways, more than 17,000 feet of terraces built, one-half mile of a small creek with ditches reshaped and sprigged, and 25 acres of timber and brush land set aside for wildlife habitat.

Continuous conservation practices followed by the Herringtons include control of mesquite, shinnery oak and cedar elm with a minimal use of chemicals. Smaller ones are pulled up with a tractor-mounted hydraulic grubber. To minimize chemical use, native pastures are mowed twice a year. Chemicals are used sparingly in areas of extreme density and difficult vegetation. Fifty acres of coastal bermuda supply hay for the Angus cattle.

Two projects have been started by the Herringtons on newly acquired ranch land. The first is grubbing small mesquite from 100 acres for reclaimed pasture. The other is developing a SCS soil conservation plan for 100 acres of highly erodible land.

Bilmar Angus Farms are beginning to reap the rewards of sound soil, water and environmental practices. They know land is our life support and it is our future.

*Nominator: Wayne Griffin, SCS District Conservationist, Hubbard, Texas*

### **SOUTH HONORABLE MENTION**

Jim Awalt, Willow Creek Farm, Lynchburg, Tenn.



### **EAST WINNER**

*Ralph & Henis Veenema  
SkiRaLoKen Farm  
Deposit, New York*

ShiRaLoKen Farm is a 250-head Angus operation utilizing 1,165 acres of hillside land on the western fringe of the Catskill Mountains. The farm consists of 110 acres of cropland, 690 acres of pasture and 365 acres of woodland.

The Veenemas and their manager, John Butler, received the 1990 Delaware County Conservation Farm Award for their ex-

tensive use of conservation management practices. They were the first non-dairy farm in Delaware County to earn this award.

Ralph purchased the farm in 1969 after falling in love with the area. The land had been neglected for five years. With help from his children and various farm managers, Ralph began the long, hard process he affectionately refers to as, "pushing the jungle back."

At the same time he contacted the SWCD for soil information to better plan his crop and pasture fields. He also sought advice from the Extension agent. Although Ralph did start raising Angus at this time, most of the emphasis was in raising dairy replacement heifers on the vast amount of pastureland.

By 1977, they had all potential pastures fenced in and it was time to concentrate on improving the cropland. Ralph realized that to get the most from the land he had to put something into it. What he started with was drainage — both subsurface and surface.

He also wanted to harness these resources to work for him. This was accomplished by using some of his drainage projects to supply a better defined source of water for cattle in pastures far from the streams.

In most recent years, they have tackled the problem of muddy barnyards. The barn is designed as the farm hub with four separate barnyard entrances. Extensive use has been made of roof gutters, fencing, gravel and concrete paving.

Efficiency is one of the keys to this farm. With wise use of fencing, they can easily move cattle to different pastures, separate them for veterinarian work or load on trailers for trucking.

After much research on pasture rotation and attending seminars such as the Grasslands Expo, a decision was made to divide 318 acres of pasture into seven paddocks for short duration grazing.

This plan fits in well with the Veenemas' strive for efficiency. Prior to this a lot of time was spent brushhogging pastures. As gas prices rose, it made them think seriously about making cattle do the work. By restricting the range of the cattle, they make more efficient use of all available forage in the paddock. When the grass is grazed down to 2 to 3 inches in height, the cattle are moved to another paddock. This allows the previous one to recuperate.

Over the past 15 years ShiRaLoKen Farm has installed many conservation practices — from barnyard water management to conservation tillage. But Ralph feels that the one that will pay the most dividends is the rotational grazing.

Although the Veenemas and Butler keep busy on the farm, they do find time to assist other organizations. Ralph is an advisor to Cornell University's animal science program and is currently a director of the New York Angus Association. Butler is a director of the New York Cattlemen's Association.

ShiRaLoKen has been an active beef farm for more than 20 years and helps add to the diversity of Delaware County agriculture. Their application of varied conservation practices shows a commitment to wise resource use.

*Nominators: Delaware County Soil & Water Conservation District, Walton, N.Y.; Frank Bechler, Sky High Farm, East Meredith, N.Y.*

### **EAST HONORABLE MENTION**

Pletcher Brothers Farms, Crooksville, Ohio  
William B. Ausley, Willow Oak Farm, Nokesville, Va.  
John Pennington, Warrenton, Va.