

NCBA Recognizes Six

Top cattle operations honored for commitment to environmental stewardship.

For 21 years, the Environmental Stewardship Award Program (ESAP) has recognized U.S. cattle producers for outstanding stewardship and conservation practices. Six diverse cattle operations were recognized as regional Environmental Stewardship Award winners Aug. 2, 2011, at the 2011 Cattle Industry Summer Conference in Kissimmee, Fla. The six operations will now compete for the national Environmental Stewardship Award, which will be announced in February 2012 during the annual Cattle Industry Convention and Trade Show in Nashville, Tenn.

Sponsored by Dow AgroSciences; the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS); the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; the National Cattlemen's Foundation (NCF); and the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA), ESAP recognizes cattle operations that use superior conservation practices to sustain the land for future generations. Candidates are judged on management of water, wildlife, vegetation and soil, as well as the nominee's leadership and the sustainability of his/her business as a whole. The ESAP award program is administered by NCF and NCBA.

"The sustainability and economic success of the U.S. cattle industry is dependent on healthy land and resources. And responsibly using and conserving resources is a priority for U.S. cattlemen and women," John Wallace, a representative from Dow AgroSciences, said. "All cattlemen, not just the six recognized last night, take pride in their conservation practices. But the six regional winners have demonstrated a commitment to innovative practices and should be commended for their efforts."

The six regional winners are The Masonic Village, Elizabethtown, Pa.; Daigle Farms, Ragley, La.; Matador Ranch, Matador Texas; M/M Feedlot, Parma Idaho; Della Ranches and the Tanner Family of Grouse Creek, Grouse Creek, Utah; and the Center of the Nation Cattle Co., Newell, S.D.

Masonic Village Farm

The Masonic Village Farm near Elizabethtown, Pa., the Region I ESAP award winner, is a not-for-profit continuing-care retirement community, owned and operated by the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania, with goals of achieving great conservational



practices while ensuring that its residents continue to enjoy open spaces. The Masonic Village employs rotational grazing to maintain its pastures; uses manure from feedlots to fertilize its fields; and has created innovative watering systems. Additionally, the farm invites the public to tour the facilities and learn more about the possibilities of stewardship in agriculture. The Pennsylvania NRCS nominated the Masonic Village.

"The Masonic Village Farm has been a pioneer in protecting and improving water quality on their operation," said Donald McNutt, administrator of the Lancaster County Conservation District. "They are an exemplary example of a progressive, well-managed beef and grazing operation, which leads to their excellent conservation stewardship ethic."

Through a dedication to responsible environmental practices and conservation, the Masonic Village Farm has partnered with federal and state agencies as well as private agricultural organizations to manage natural resources. According to a letter of support, Lance Kauf, Pennsylvania Cattlemen's Association president, said the Masonic Village Farm is an exemplary steward of the land.

"Our association recognizes the efforts of those in our industry that embrace environmental stewardship practices and encourage others through their promotion of best management practices developed for our members within our state," Kauf said. "They have implemented numerous practices and consistently share the positive impacts they have made environmentally with others in our industry who are trying to achieve the same goal."

Daigle Farms

Daigle Farms, owned by David Daigle in Ragley, La., is the Region II ESAP award winner. Daigle runs a cow herd in wetland

areas classified as "Critically Imperiled Habitat" by the Louisiana Natural Heritage Program. Through utilizing grazing management and prescribed burning, he not only maintains a productive cattle operation, but also provides habitat for the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker and the American chaffseed plant.

His stewardship practices and cattle genetic selection have allowed him to produce beef with minimum inputs. According to the Louisiana Grazing Lands Conservation Coalition and USDA NRCS in Louisiana, which jointly nominated Daigle Farms, his conservation practices ensure the sustainability of the ecosystem. Through a dedication to responsible environmental practices and conservation, Daigle has partnered with federal and state agencies to manage natural resources and preserve wildlife habitat.

In a letter of support for Daigle's nomination, Chris Ebel, NRCS rangeland management specialist, said Daigle tries to consider how management decisions affect long-term sustainability of the whole system.

"To David Daigle, sustainability is simple," Ebel said. "Manage the natural resources so that the system works to produce products that are useful to man. If the manager does this without substantially degrading any of the system components, then you have sustainability. He (Daigle) continuously goes out of his way to promote conservation and sustainable agriculture."

Matador Ranch

Matador Ranch, managed by Bob Kilmer near Matador, Texas, is the Region IV ESAP award winner.

The Matador Ranch demonstrates its role as a steward of the land through its conservation practices. The ranch executes a well-organized grazing rotation and brush management program to supplement its cow-calf herd. Through its efforts to conserve natural resources, the Matador Ranch increases the forage available for livestock and wildlife while enhancing natural springs and improving riparian areas. The ranch was awarded the Lone Star Stewards Award in 2010. According to the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers (TSCRA) and the Texas Section, Society for Range Management (TSSRM), which jointly nominated Matador Ranch, Kilmer and his

colleagues know they have to be full partners with Mother Nature to be successful.

“In the face of prolonged droughts, they have to optimally conserve the natural resources — or they will be out of business,” TSCRA and TSSRM said. “As a result of their dedication to market-based principles and strategies, the Matador ranch has achieved a number of successes in ensuring that its natural resources are not only being used to produce a customer-preferred product, but also to improve resources for the long term.”

Through a dedication to responsible environmental practices and conservation, Kilmer and his colleagues have worked with a number of governmental and nongovernmental agencies and third-party consultants to manage natural resources. In a letter of support for Matador Ranch, Dana Wright, wildlife biologist for Texas Parks and Wildlife, said Matador Ranch continually strives to improve its property through water development, prescribed grazing, prescribed fire and brush management.

“The Matador Ranch is committed to improving the quality of their natural resources and all management decisions take into consideration the long-term impacts that those practices will have on plants, water, livestock and wildlife,” Wright said. “The Matador Ranch has exhibited good land stewardship practices and has used innovative ideas to enhance their natural resources on the property.”

M/M Feedlot

M/M Feedlot, owned by Kent Mann of Parma, Idaho, is the Region V ESAP award winner.

According to the Idaho Cattlemen’s Association, which nominated M/M Feedlot, Mann feeds more than 10,000 cattle each year. Conscious of the waste produced by his operation, he implemented innovative waste management and water purifying practices. He has created a pond that allows sediments from a nearby stream to settle before the water enters the Snake River and started a composting business using the manure cleaned weekly from the pen. Mann actively participates in resource conservation, employs forward-thinking nutrition plans and stays involved in his community.

Jennifer Ellis, Idaho Cattlemen’s Association past president, said Mann sets a standard of excellence not only in the product he delivers, but in every area of stewardship that can be ascribed to a cattle producer.

“Mann’s carefully managed operation is a show-piece for the industry, and his management practices have influenced other operations,” Ellis said. “He has implemented

forward-thinking practices in nutrition, purchasing, waste management, resources conservation, moving and handling of cattle, neighbor relations, community involvement and more.”

Through a dedication to responsible environmental practices and conservation, Mann has worked closely with NRCS, the Idaho Department of Agriculture, the Idaho State Department of Fish and Game, the Boy Scouts of America, and others to manage natural resources. According to a letter of support for M/M Feedlot’s nomination, Celia Gould, director of the Idaho Department of Agriculture, said ‘doing things right’ is a standard operating procedure at M/M Feedlot.

“The feedlot serves as a shining example of how feeding cattle can be profitable without cutting corners and demonstrates that conservation and productivity are not mutually exclusive concepts,” she said.

Della Ranches

Della Ranches, owned by the Tanner family near Grouse Creek, Utah, is the Region VI ESAP award winner.

According to the Utah Cattlemen’s Association, which nominated Della Ranches, Blaine and Julie Tanner, Jay and Diane Tanner, and Brent and Conny Tanner not only exhibit stewardship of private and public grazing lands, they also assume leadership roles in organizations promoting conservation. The family works to reduce soil erosion, maintain forage for cattle and wildlife, increase water quality and preserve local native species. David Eliason, president of the Utah Cattlemen’s Association, said the Tanners take great pride in their land and are recognized as leaders in environmental stewardship practices.

“The Tanner family has an unsurpassed legacy of stewardship in ranching on their northern Utah and southern Idaho cattle ranching outfit,” Eliason said. “The Grouse Creek area is in a very tough and harsh high-desert environment. Their ability to manage range improvements, wildlife and a livestock enterprise does not come easily and can only be successful through hard work and good stewardship practices. They have certainly made a beautiful and productive ranch in an area that took a lot of effort to be successful.”

Through a dedication to responsible environmental practices and conservation, the Tanner family has worked closely with NRCS; the Utah Department of Natural

Resources; Utah Division of Wildlife; the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Bureau of Land Management; wildlife research biologists; and many other agencies and groups to manage natural resources and improve range health.

According to a letter of support for Della Ranches’ nomination, Jeff Schrick, USDA NRCS district conservationist, said the Tanner family has always been concerned with improving the land they control to make it better and more sustainable.

Cattlemen are often called the best stewards of the land. NCBA recognized six U.S. cattle operations for their commitment to sustaining their family operations by conserving land, resources and wildlife.

Center of the Nation Cattle Co.

The Center of the Nation Cattle Co., owned by Jeff and Kim Smeenck and Steve and Kay Smeenck, near Newell, S.D., is the Region VII ESAP award winner.

According to the South Dakota Cattlemen’s Association, which nominated the Center of the Nation Cattle Co., Smeenck’s 100-year-old family operation thrives on the sustainable practices of stewardship. Not only does the family continue to develop the land for its own cow-calf herd and the native wildlife, but they also actively participate in other associations and programs to educate about innovative stewardship practices. The Smeenck family has taken steps to protect their natural resources while maintaining a sustainable business operation.

Through a dedication to responsible environmental practices and conservation, the Smeenck family has worked closely with NRCS; the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks; the South Dakota State University Cooperative Extension Service; and various other agencies and organizations to improve conservation and stewardship practices.

In his letter of support for the Center of the Nation Cattle Co., Steve Fairbairn, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service private lands wildlife biologist, said it is very evident that the Smeencks are interested in running a profitable cattle operation while providing a wide variety of high-quality wildlife habitats; improving water quality; reducing soil erosion and controlling invasive wild plants.

Fairbairn said the Smeencks manage the range in a manner that allows them to maximize grass and beef production while protecting the natural environment at the same time. He said the Center of the Nation Cattle Co. is a great example of how ranching and wildlife can go hand in hand.

