

# Environmental Honors

Seven U.S. cattle operations win environmental award for 2008.

by *Melissa Tessitore*

**S**even regional winners of the Environmental Stewardship Award Program (ESAP) were announced at the Cattle Industry Summer Meeting in July. The annual award, now in its 18th year, recognizes cattle operations that are proven stewards of the land and dedicated to natural resource conservation through the use of innovative, cost-effective stewardship practices.

"The seven regional winners have made extensive efforts to work closely with their local communities and government agencies, conservation and wildlife organizations, including The Nature Conservancy, to assist in the development of conservation practices and protecting valuable rangelands," says Dave Petty, chairman of the 2008 Environmental Stewardship Award Selection Committee. "They have seen the value in building partnerships that strengthen their operation. These folks showcase how the implementation of cooperative research efforts, educational events and government programs can really pay off."

The award is administered by the National Cattlemen's Foundation (NCF) and sponsored by Dow AgroSciences LLC, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

Profiles of the 2008 Regional Environmental Stewardship Award Winners follow.

## **Region I: Sennett Cattle Co. Waynetown, Ind.**

Clark Sennett and family, owners of Sennett Cattle Co. of Waynetown, Ind., were named Region I winners. Nominated by the Indiana Cattlemen's Association, they represent the northeastern United States, a region including nine states, from Kentucky to New York.

The multidimensional operation includes feeding, registered and commercial cow-calf, and farming operations. This diversity allows Clark Sennett to be both economically and environmentally sustainable in an ever-changing market.

"Sennett Cattle Company is dedicated to environmental stewardship and serves as a leader for the cattle industry," explained Petty. "Clark and family have taken proactive steps to ensure an environmentally

**"These families have successfully conducted stewardship practices that serve as exemplary models for all cattle producers. They are actively working to protect and improve the environment and have proven that stewardship and good business can go hand-in-hand."**

— *David Petty*

sustainable operation while educating the leaders of tomorrow through field days, tours and others involved in the industry. They demonstrate how environmentally friendly practices through their feedlot operation can benefit their farming operation."

Clark Sennett returned to the family operation after he graduated from Purdue University in 1970 with a degree in animal science. He worked alongside his father for nine years and acquired the farm in the mid-1980s. Clark's son, Lance, joined the operation in 1995 after completing his degree and has assisted his father in expanding the environmental operatives of the company.

Sennett Cattle Co. now markets 1,800 head of feeder cattle in Indiana and 500 head in Kansas. The operation also manages 115 head of registered Limousin and 115 head of commercial cow-calf pairs and farms 7,000 acres.

The diverse cattle/farming operation also consists of a fenced wooded acreage and ponds to provide valuable habitat for wildlife.

"With such diversity, Sennett Cattle Company has flourished in an environment of scrutiny and is able to be sustainable due to environmental and stewardship practices," Petty explained. "Implementing rotational grazing, manure management, wildlife habitat restoration and minimum/no-till planting practices has allowed them to be economically sustainable."

Sennett's ongoing work with the NRCS has allowed him to seek technical assistance in planning and implementing runoff storage facilities from his feedlot to protect waterways and use the runoff through his grazing management plan by applying it

at agronomic rates across his fields semiannually.

"Sennett utilizes numerous practices to improve soil and water quality through a diverse number of practices," said Jane Hardisty, Indiana state conservationist for NRCS. "Mr. Sennett also takes the time to share his knowledge and lessons learned to help other producers with their operations, and serve as a leader in the state."

Sennett is an active member of the Indiana Cattlemen's Association and Illinois Farm Business Farm Management Program (FBFM). Serving on committees or providing valuable financial advice for fellow farmers or ranchers is not unusual for Clark. He was honored by the Farm Progress Companies as a Master Farmer for his efforts and achievements. Only a select few production agriculturists are given this prestigious award each year.

"I have never met anyone more passionate about the beef industry," said Sennett's son, Lance. "Dad's love for raising cattle is shown in everything that he does. From serving as a spokesman for the cattle industry to being engaged at all levels of the cattle association, Dad gives much of his time and money to promote beef production and consumption."

Petty adds, "For this Indiana farm, conservation is a family affair that is being passed on to the next generation. The environmental enhancements they've made make them a model for other farms and ranches in their region."

## **Region II: Yon Family Farms Ridge Spring, S.C.**

The Yon family (Yon Family Farms) of Ridge Spring, S.C., was nominated by the Saluda Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) and represents Region II, which includes eight southeastern states, from Louisiana to North Carolina.

"The Yon family exhibits tremendous stewardship with regard to pasture management, forage preservation, crop implementation and water quality improvement," Petty explained.

Established in 1996, the farm is family-owned and operated by Kevin and Lydia Yon and their three children. The farm includes 1,500 acres of cropland, hay and pastureland.

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It's also a diversified Angus seedstock operation that incorporates income from the sale of seed and feed for livestock, freezer beef and the children's sweet corn sales. Realizing the importance of sustainability, the Yons work to ensure their soil and water resources are healthy. They believe in whole-farm conservation, focusing on the big picture when it comes to stewardship.

Partnering with USDA-NRCS and the Saluda SWCD, the Yons have utilized technical and financial assistance to install practices and easement through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Forestry Incentives Program (FIP), Conservation Security Program (CSP) and Grassland Reserve Program (GRP). With such partnerships, the Yons have implemented no-till practices, rotational crop planting sequences, nutrient and pest management, forage and soil sampling that have enabled them to become "grass farmers."

"The Yons have taken their passion for the land and cattle and implemented sound conservation practices on their operation," Petty said. "Working as a family, they have been able to build one of the most reputable seedstock operations in the southeast, while instilling values for the land in their children."

In cooperation with the NRCS and the Saluda SWCD, the Yons have developed a comprehensive plan to increase forage production and reduce sedimentation and erosion. Installing 28 water troughs, 55,352 feet (ft.) of cross-fencing, and 34,616 square (sq.) ft. of heavy materials to protect against erosion has allowed the operation to become economically sustainable and environmentally friendly.

Yon Family Farms has been home to many activities that include producer tours, educational studies, conservation programs and hosting interns. One of the greatest effects they have on the cattle industry is their activity with future cattle producers. Hosting international students, conducting internships and training future leaders of the cattle industry has enabled them to share their passion and love for the cattle industry and the land.

"They have a solid understanding of the interdependence of natural resources, and their approach to conservation works," said



► Named Region II winner of the 2008 Environmental Stewardship Award is Yon Family Farms, Ridge Spring, S.C. Pictured are (from left) Clark Willingham, NCF trustee; Lydia and Kevin Yon; and Travis Hunt, Dow ranch and pasture specialist.

PHOTOS BY TROY SMITH

Hugh Smith, Saluda County NRCS district conservationist. "It is a family business that does all the right things and makes my job easier and allows me to showcase them for their commitment."

### Region III: Guge Family Farm Estherville, Iowa

The Guge family farm in Estherville, Iowa, was nominated by the Iowa Cattlemen's Association. They were selected to represent Region III, which includes Iowa, Missouri, Illinois, Wisconsin and Minnesota.

"The family demonstrates how today's cattle operations can utilize cooperative partnerships to problem-solve while maintaining an environmentally friendly business," Petty explained.

Mark and Norma Guge own and operate a commercial cow-calf, feedlot and farming operation, which runs on owned and long-term leased acreage. With family roots in the area dating back to 1891, the Guge family has developed a love for the land as short-term tenants with aspirations of passing on the traditions that have been passed on to them.

"The Guges have taken conservation and economic sustainability seriously with the building of partnerships and the development of TwoRiver Cattle LLC," Petty added. "Their commitment to the land and their cattle is evident in their work ethic and multigenerational commitment to the future."

The Guge's conservation ethic began with Myron Guge in 1944. Now, partnering with the Iowa Forage and Grassland Council and the USDA-NRCS the Guges have implemented rotational grazing plans for their pastureland and crop rotations

that utilize contour farming to maximize profitability. This has been a practice for 50 years on the Guge farm. They have transitioned into a no-till drill to seed soybeans into cornstalk residue and leave soybean stubble undisturbed until immediately prior to planting when manure from the feedlot is added to the soil as fertilizer.

When reconstructing their 300-head feedlot, the Guges implemented a manure catch basin. Berms were built below the feedlot with a slotted gate system for settling out the solids from feedlot runoff. Below the settling basin, an area of grasses has been seeded, which helps reduce

runoff and lessen erosion. This area is left primarily ungrazed and makes an excellent wildlife habitat. Fenceline bunks, cement aprons and mounds are the base for the feedlot with all cattle marketed through TwoRiver Cattle LLC.

The Guges are proactively involved in promoting conservation in the community. Hosting pasture walks with business and industry peers is important. In working with the Iowa Lakes Controlled Grazing project, the Guges have hosted more than 1,000 people for grazing education and demonstration projects. They have also made statewide presentations with 1,400 producers in attendance.

"Mark's enthusiasm is demonstrated to his peers and community through pasture walks he has hosted and speaking engagements he has been involved in," said Wayne Shafer, NRCS district conservationist. "He built his enterprise with the environmental ethics instilled in him by his family."

### Region IV: Bradley 3 Ranch Memphis, Texas

The Bradley family of Memphis, Texas, has been selected as one of seven regional winners of the 2008 Environmental Stewardship Award. The Bradleys were chosen as recipients from Region IV, which includes Texas, Oklahoma and Arkansas.

Located in north Texas near the Red River, the Bradley 3 Ranch is owned by Minnie Lou Bradley, her daughter Mary Lou Bradley-Henderson and son-in-law James Henderson. The ranch operates on 11,500 acres, which sustain the purebred registered cattle operation and wildlife.

“Bradley 3 Ranch has participated in every segment of the cattle industry, and their efforts toward conservation are remarkable,” Petty explained. “Conservation and sustainability are imperative in today’s economy, and the Bradley 3 Ranch gets it.”

The ranch was purchased in 1954 by Minnie Lou and her husband, Bill, during the legendary drought of the 1950s. Partnering with Bill’s parents, the couple purchased 3,000 acres the first year and the remaining 7,500 acres the following year. Since Mary Lou has joined the operation, she has purchased an additional 1,000 adjoining acres that provide valuable acreage for intensive grazing. The Bradleys manage their registered operation as if it were a commercial herd, realizing that their market for bulls is demanding functional cattle that can work in their environment.

Maintaining productive forage lands and improving native pastures has been one of the top priorities for the Bradley 3 Ranch, since it is a year-round grazing operation. When Minnie Lou became the manager of the ranch in 1997, she consulted with range management advisors from NRCS and Texas AgriLife Extension. Their advice was to implement an aerial spraying program to control mesquite, but to do so at a time when it would not affect neighboring cotton farms. In addition, in 2004, the ranch began mechanical removal of redberry juniper on a limited basis to further open pastures on the Bradley 3 Ranch.

“Minnie Lou is not only a progressive thinker, but a true pioneer and innovator in the cattle industry,” Petty said. “When you include Mary Lou and James, this operation is one of the most progressive cattle operations in the region, if not the country.”

In working with the local FFA chapter, the Bradleys utilized global positioning system (GPS) collars to track the grazing patterns of their cattle to determine the use and grazing capacity in its current forage state. In analyzing the data, they determined that necessary mesquite and juniper removal was crucial, along with strategically developing watering units in areas that would not only benefit the cattle, but wildlife as well.

They have developed 26 automatic watering systems for birds, and a total of 24 watering sources have been developed, made up of windmills, solar-powered pumps, pipelines from submersible pumps and a rural water line. The Bradley 3 Ranch



► Named Region IV winner of the 2008 Environmental Stewardship Award is Bradley 3 Ranch, Memphis, Texas. Pictured are (from left) Willingham, Mary Lou Bradley-Henderson, James Henderson and Hunt.

has begun supplementing income with wild game hunts. Turkey, quail and white-tailed deer populations are just some of the abundant wildlife that have grown, due to mesquite and juniper thinning and water development.

“Minnie Lou, Mary Lou and James are leaders in the cattle industry,” Petty said. “They have participated in every segment of the industry and served on countless local, state and national committees. Minnie Lou is the only woman to have ever served as president of the American Angus Association and was inducted into the National Cowgirl Hall of Fame.”

Given the successes of the Bradley 3 Ranch, it is evident why Texas Christian University (TCU) Ranch Management program has chosen the operation to serve as a host and educational classroom for the past 52 years.

“The Bradleys have always tried to do what is best for the environment, the cattle they produce, and most importantly, the consumer who buys their product,” said Kerry Cornelius, director, TCU Burnett Ranches professor. “They are shining examples of the quality of people involved in the beef industry.”

### **Region V: Veseth Cattle Co. Malta, Mont.**

Veseth Cattle Co. of Malta, Mont., was selected to represent Region V, which includes Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, Oregon and Washington. They were nominated by the Montana Stockgrowers Association.

The Veseth family has been involved in land conservation since they arrived in the area in 1886. Four generations now live and work on the operation. The ranch has operated as a cow-calf operation, managing Red Angus composite females and utilizing

an intensive artificial insemination (AI) program.

Veseth has partnered with neighboring operations to multiply quality genetics, pasture cattle during dryer years and participate in their heifer development program. These partnerships have strengthened the operation and encouraged the spread of stewardship and conservation. When one rancher tries something new and it is successful, the management practice is widely adopted. They call it “evolutionary management.”

Since 1905, the ranch and its conservation partners, the BLM, NRCS and Ducks Unlimited (DU), have developed 156 reservoirs/pit-dams. These water

developments help distribute livestock and reduce the effects on traditional riparian areas, while enhancing wildlife habitat. With hunting regulations and well-managed resources, the area is known today for its ample wildlife. In fact, Phillips County, where the Veseths operate, is home to 12 of the 13 endemic grassland birds of North America.

As one of the founding operations of the Ranchers Stewardship Alliance, the Veseths serve as leaders in the cattle industry, conducting operation tours and developing opportunities to increase sustainability.

“The Veseths continue the family ranching tradition, while also emerging as leaders in creating a bright and productive future for their land and community through innovative stewardship,” said Jamie Williams, Montana state director of The Nature Conservancy.

In working with The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Dale Veseth developed an incentives program using the 60,000-acre Matador Ranch that had been purchased by TNC. They developed conservation values to reward ranchers for providing wildlife habitat on their own ranches for prairie dogs and sage grouse. The program is designed with incentives for noxious weed prevention and eradication, provides a moratorium on converting native rangeland to cropland, and encourages certification in the Undaunted Stewardship Program. This program is known as the “Matador Grassbank.”

“It is difficult to list all the accomplishments that the Veseth family has made and the partnerships they have created,” Petty says. “They have received several state, regional and national honors

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for their commitment to environmental practices while maintaining a profitable cattle operation.”

### **Region VI: Babacomari Ranch Sonoita, Ariz.**

The Brophy families of Sonoita, Ariz., are regional winners of the 2008 Environmental Stewardship Award. They were selected from entries submitted within Region VI, which includes California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico and Hawaii.

Located five miles from the Mexico border, the Babacomari Ranch is a family-owned operation that was purchased by the Brophy family in 1935. The Brophys were the third owners of this history-rich land, once owned by the King of Spain. Currently, three generations own and operate the family ranch, and assisted by ranch foreman Doug Ruppel, the Babacomari Ranch is the longest continuous section of land in the state of Arizona. Spanning 26 miles in length, the ranch varies in elevation from 5,600 ft. to 4,000 ft. and comprises 28,300 acres.

“The Babacomari Ranch has distinguished itself as a productive land and cattle operation in a location facing forage challenges because of terrain,” Petty said. “This is an extremely diverse operation that has worked collaboratively with multiple local, state and national groups to restore hundreds of acres of grasslands, riparian habitat and endangered species.”

When purchased by Frank Brophy in 1935, the ranch was run as a registered Hereford operation. His main work, spanning 25 years, was the recapturing of fertile grasslands with intense conservation work. In 1951, Frank placed the ranch into a family corporation that would keep the operation in family hands and where it is today involving four generations of Brophy family ownership.

Today the ranch is a unique ownership structure by 57 family members. The ranch is led by managing partner, Ben Brophy. Babacomari Ranch is operated today as a stocker cattle enterprise managing a combination of feeder steers and a bred-heifer development program.

“Ben and family have developed an ownership base that allows family members to be involved in the cattle operation while living all over the country,” Petty said. “Conservation has been a component of the operation since it was purchased by Frank Brophy and continues to be today. The Brophy family’s commitment to the land,

wildlife and cattle industry is evident in the many improvements they have made on their operation.”

By partnering with the USDA-NRCS and the Natural Resources Conservation District (NRCD), the Brophy family has developed 25 monitoring transects throughout the ranch since 1996 for trend analysis and management implications. In addition, they are involved in two EQIP contracts covering brush control, water development and fencing, and one Watershed Habitat Improvement Program (WHIP) contract to improve and protect critical spring water ecology and the endangered Gila Chub fish.

Through one of the EQIP contracts, the Babacomari Ranch has been able to implement root plowing on 2,000 acres that opened up the land to increased water saturation and decreased sheet erosion while increasing forage production. Partnerships do not end there for the Babacomari Ranch. In partnering with TNC, the Brophys are working to place 16,000 acres of the ranch into conservation easements held by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

“With an open gate policy, the Babacomari Ranch has welcomed people and organizations to their ranch to learn about conservation, stewardship, wildlife and cattle,” Petty said. “The combination of family values, work ethic and a progressive understanding of conservation, the Babacomari Ranch is rich in tradition and education.”

Neighboring the Appleton-Whittell Research Ranch (AWRR), owned by the National Audubon Society, the Babacomari is leading the way in conservation. In working with the Audubon Society, the Babacomari ranch has assisted in research based around grazing effects on forage and wildlife that has shaped conservation and land management actions in the semiarid grasslands of the Southwest.

It is easy to see that the Babacomari mission is being met: “The Babacomari Ranch is a profit-oriented company that holistically protects preserves and enhances the natural resources, historic integrity and aesthetic qualities of the Babacomari Ranch while providing a creative and collaborative environment that enhances the quality of life for its landowners, neighbors and employees.”

“Many research and monitoring studies have been conducted on the Babacomari and on AWRR, providing comparisons between grazed and ungrazed sites,” said

Linda Kennedy, director of AWRR. “In my eight-year tenure here, the Brophy enterprise has never turned down a request to conduct a study on their land.”

### **Region VII: Hovde Ranch Alexander, N.D.**

Located in the northwestern corner of North Dakota, the Hovde Ranch of Alexander, N.D., was nominated by the North Dakota Stockmen’s Association (NDSA) and selected to represent Region VII, which includes North and South Dakota, Nebraska and Kansas.

Owned by Lynn and Patti Hovde, the operation is a commercial cow-calf, backgrounding, feedlot and heifer development program. Homesteaded in 1907, the Hovdes raise cash crops of spring wheat, malting barley and safflower.

A multifaceted operation, the Hovde family researched and developed a dam to hold water for irrigation purposes in 1978. The project was developed with the McKenzie County Soil Conservation Service (now NRCS) and North Dakota Water Commission.

In 1995, the irrigation pond began to also serve as a storage pond for the feedlot and met all necessary codes required by state and federal laws with assistance from NRCS. The pond began to serve even more purposes, including a water reserve for the irrigation systems, feedlot runoff and habitat for waterfowl. With the low amount of annual rainfall, the water storage facility has benefited the operation in providing a water source for cattle, crops and wildlife.

The Hovde’s additional environmental enhancements to the land include no-till farming, shelterbelts and a nutrient management plan. In working with the NRCS through EQIP, the Hovdes are creating shelterbelts that include the removal of dead tree rows from the 30-year-old shelterbelt to improve forage production and interim protection from the cold winter winds.

“Partnerships are important for the Hovde family, and it’s apparent in their ranch improvements,” Petty said. “In growing their operation, the family has implemented conservation practices that are innovative, productive and environmentally friendly. The practices that Lynn and Patti have implemented are being passed on to their son and his family, who have returned to the family ranch to learn, grow and assist his parents in meeting their stewardship goals.”

In addition to their water storage pond, the Arnegard Dam, a recreational body of water, also sits on their ranch. The McKenzie County (N.D.) Park Board holds the easement to the land surrounding the man-made lake. In working with the North Dakota Game and Fish Department and the state water commission, they restocked the dam with adult northern pike, along with making environmental cosmetic repairs to the dam.

The ranch's water development practices have increased the abundant wildlife that co-exists with the growing cattle operation. Each of the seemingly separate enterprises on the Hovde Ranch is actually dependent on the others.

The cow-calf operation is responsible for harvesting the grass, and the calves enter the feedlot either as backgrounded steers or heifers for replacement development.

The solid materials from the feedlot are used as a natural fertilizer that is applied to the crop lands at agronomic rates based on soil samples that have been taken for analysis. Linked together, the operation acts as a chain in creating a sustainable operation



► Named Region VII winner of the 2008 Environmental Stewardship Award is Hovde Ranch, Alexander, N.D. Pictured are (from left) Willingham, Patti and Lynn Hovde, and Hunt.

that is co-dependent upon the other income sources.

"The Hovde's chain approach has allowed them to increase productivity and strengthen their commitment to the cattle industry," Petty said. "They have been able to increase their feeding capacity and have assisted fellow producers in backgrounding their cattle. In providing this service to their neighbors, the Hovdes are leaders in

their community and the cattle industry."

"The Hovdes are always looking to gain further knowledge," added Paul Deutsch, North Dakota NRCS district conservationist. "You see them at workshops for livestock management, range tours, crop production or anything educational that will help them improve their operation. With the Hovde's son Nathan and his family returning to the operation, it shows that this ranch will keep moving in a positive direction for the next generation."

The 2008 Environmental Stewardship Award Selection Committee consists of past award winners, university faculty, federal and state government agencies, and conservation and environmental organizations.

The 2008 national winner will be selected from one of the seven regional winners and revealed at the 2008 Cattle Industry Convention in Phoenix, Ariz., next January. For additional information contact the NCF at 303-694-0305.

