



## **NATIONAL CATTLEMEN'S BEEF ASSOCIATION**

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### **For Immediate Release**

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## **Alabama Ranch Wins Top Environmental Award**

Dee River Ranch is ESAP Region II Recipient

Washington, D.C. (July 18, 2007) –The Dee family of Aliceville, Alabama has been selected as one of the Regional Winners of the 2007 Environmental Stewardship Award Program (ESAP). The national award program is administered by the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) and sponsored by Dow AgroSciences L.L.C. and USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The award recognizes cattle producers across the nation who utilize innovative, cost effective stewardship practices that contribute to environmental conservation.

Located on the Alabama – Mississippi line, Dee River Ranch was nominated by the Alabama Cattlemen's Association and represents NCBA's Region II, which includes eight southeastern states spanning from Louisiana to North Carolina.

"The Dee family exhibits tremendous stewardship with regard to erosion management, forage preservation, crop implementation and water quality improvement," explains Dave Petty, Chairman of the selection committee. "They've utilized the resources available to them to partner in developing stewardship and conservation goals and objectives."

Dee River Ranch is a family owned and operated farming operation, run by Mike Dee and his sister Annie. The ranch includes 10,000 acres: 2,500 acres for forages and cattle, 4,000 acres in the Conservation Reserve Program, and 3,500 acres devoted to corn, wheat, and soybeans. In 1989, the Dee family sold their Florida ranch to the State of Florida as part of the "Save the Rivers" program and purchased their current operation.

Maintaining productive soils is a top priority on the Dee River Ranch, which is witnessed in the three components of their ranch: cropland; highly erodible, environmentally sensitive land; and hay/grazing land. Improvements in pasture management and implementation of erosion control practices have maintained valuable resources while maximizing production. On-surface water monitoring now indicates little if any soil erosion from pastures.

"The Dee family pays careful attention to the health of their pastures," says Petty. "By keeping accurate and concise records, Dee River Ranch ensures that the pastures and crop land are sustainable for years to come."

In cooperation with the NRCS and Alabama Cooperative Extension System (ACES), Mike developed a comprehensive plan to reduce sedimentation and erosion and improve water quality that served as an example for fellow producers. Mike identified three types of high-use problem-causing areas: gates, water troughs, and working facilities. A combination of geo-textile cloth and gravel was applied around all water troughs and under all gates. In 2006, Mike completed construction of new working facilities away from surface water.

In addition, Mike incorporated cross-fencing on all pastures, and implemented an intensive rotational grazing program to preserve ground cover.

The Dee River Ranch has been home to many partnerships that include producer tours, educational studies and conservation programs. One of the greatest impacts they have on the cattle industry is their activity with the Alabama Rural Medicine Program. Dee Ranch serves as a learning laboratory for medical students enrolled in the University Of Alabama School Of Medicine.

“The extensive research and data collected on the ranch makes the Dee River Ranch an operation of influence and a model of innovation and cooperation,” says Petty. “Mike and Annie have developed a self-supporting ranching operation that incorporates the community and educational sector.”

Dee River Ranch’s experience in preventative moisture loss conservation practices has especially proved valuable this year, due to the severe drought in the southeastern U.S.

“Mike is truly one of those rare individuals who has the insight and motivation to make an environmental difference for his legacy to follow,” say Terry Williamson, NRCS District Conservationist. “He is never hesitant when asked to host a field day or training seminar for the surrounding producers in west Alabama and east Mississippi. The Dee River Ranch is a deserving operation that has an open-door policy and is always willing to share their knowledge and experiences.”

The Environmental Stewardship Award Program, now in its 17th year, is sponsored by Dow AgroSciences LLC and USDA’s NRCS and is administered by NCBA. The 2007 National Winner will be selected from one of the ESAP Regional Winners and announced at the 2008 Cattle Industry Convention in Reno, Nevada next February. For additional information, contact NCBA’s Washington D.C. office at 202-347-0228.

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*The National Cattlemen’s Beef Association (NCBA) is the largest organization representing America’s cattle industry. Initiated in 1898, NCBA is the industry leader in education, influencing public policy to improve producer profitability and in preserving the industry’s heritage and future. Efforts are made possible through membership contributions. To join, contact NCBA at 1-866-BEEF-USA or [membership@beef.org](mailto:membership@beef.org).*