



NATIONAL CATTLEMEN'S BEEF ASSOCIATION

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For Immediate Release

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Missouri Ranch Wins Top Environmental Award

Oak Knoll Ranch is ESAP Region III Winner

Washington, D.C. (July 18, 2007) – The Kreisler family of Oak Knoll Ranch in Salem, Missouri is one of the Regional Winners in the 17th annual Environmental Stewardship Award Program (ESAP). The award program recognizes cattle operations that are proven stewards of the land, dedicated to natural resource conservation through the use of innovative, cost effective stewardship practices.

Located in south central Missouri, Oak Knoll Ranch was nominated by the Top of the Ozarks. They were selected from entries submitted within the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA)'s Region III, which includes Iowa, Missouri, Illinois, Wisconsin and Minnesota.

"Our program acknowledges producers who realize the importance of stewardship and conservation, and recognizes operations like Oak Knoll Ranch for their efforts in these areas," explains Dave Petty, Chairman of the selection committee. "The Kreisler family demonstrates how today's cattle operations can utilize cooperative partnerships to problem-solve while maintaining an environmentally-friendly business."

Leon and Helen Kreisler own and operate Oak Knoll Ranch, a 100 head cow/calf operation which runs on 360 owned acres and 120 acres on long-term lease. Their commercial Angus herd is ran on 380 acres of grass, and the remaining 100 acres are in timber production. In addition to the cattle and timber production, the Kreisler's also provide limited hunting leases.

"The Kreislers set personal environmental and stewardship goals and then evaluate their effectiveness on a regular basis," says Petty. "Their commitment to the land and their cattle is evident in their work ethic and commitment to do 100 percent of the labor on the farm. Their thirst for knowledge allowed them to build valuable partnerships for which they utilize today."

A partnership with the Missouri Department of Conservation provided the initial funding to set up a grazing system, years ago. They have spent years utilizing Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) technical assistance in designing a water system and prescribed burns. The Kreislers became one of the organizing members of the Advanced Graziers Group, a multi-county producer-driven network. Leon and Helen have solicited the knowledge of guest speakers and implemented a farm tour program within this group to actively learn more about potential conservation practices.

"Oak Knoll Ranch's continued partnerships in the community in the efforts on environmental practices make them an exceptional representative for the industry," say Petty. "Their participation in joint programs allowed the Kreislers to have an open farm approach to educating fellow producers and the community about the importance of agriculture and conservation."

When designing their management intensive grazing system, water location and availability were limiting factors. Therefore, the Kreislers installed seven fountain waterers, five tire tanks, and two freeze-proof concrete waterers off two wells and thirteen ponds. All ponds are fenced to allow limited access. Due to the rotation of animals and non-confinement, manure is evenly distributed throughout the acreage. To provide wildlife habitat, Leon and Helen have diversified the forage base, installed a multitude of bluebird and purple martin birdhouses, and leave brush-piles from forestry thinning.

The Kreislers are proactively involved in local, regional, state, and even national leadership organizations to promote stewardship and conservation. The list is long. At the state level, Leon is Vice Chair of the Missouri Soil and Water District Commission, directing hundreds of state conservation districts. Leon is a leader on the Missouri Beef Council, the Missouri Cattlemen's Association, and a long-term board member of the Missouri Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative Committee. Nationally, Leon represented Missouri producers on the U.S. Meat Export Federation for more than seven years.

"The Kreislers are very involved, and the environmental enhancements made throughout the Oak Knoll Ranch make it a model for other farms and ranches to emulate," says Petty. "And many nearby ranchers are taking notice. Following the Kreisler's lead, local area operators have adopted similar approaches to soil and water management."

The family operation has been able to accomplish their goals of increasing their cattle herd while not increasing their acreage or fertilizer inputs. Utilizing the available resources, Oak Knoll Ranch only feeds hay for 20-40 days/year, and has diversified the forage base to support a variety of wildlife.

"The Kreislers have been very proactive in promoting sound grassland management that is economically viable and ecologically sustainable," says Eric Bright, of the Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative. "They are true stewards for both the cattle industry and conservation."

The Environmental Stewardship Award Program, now in its 17th year, is sponsored by Dow AgroSciences LLC and USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service and is administered by NCBA. The 2007 National Winner will be selected from of the seven ESAP Regional Winners and revealed 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.