



For Immediate Release

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California Ranch Wins Top Environmental Award

Yolo Land & Cattle Co. is ESAP Region VI Winner

Washington, D.C. (July 18, 2007) – The Stone families of Woodland, California are Regional Winners of the 2007 Environmental Stewardship Award Program (ESAP). In its 17th year, 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 on the outskirts of Sacramento, California, the Yolo Land & Cattle Co. is a family-owned limited partnership. This cow/calf, stocker, and registered cattle operation was nominated by the California Cattlemen's Association and the California Rangeland Trust. They were selected from entries submitted within the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA)'s Region VI, which includes California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, and Hawaii.

"Yolo Land & Cattle Co. has distinguished itself as a productive land and cattle operation in a location facing increased development pressure from urban sprawl," says Dave Petty, Chairman of the selection committee. "This is an extremely diverse operation that has worked collaboratively with multiple local, state, and national groups to restore hundred of acres of grasslands, riparian habitat, and stock ponds with California native flora."

Formed in 1976, Yolo Land & Cattle Co. was a partnership between Henry Stone and John Anderson. In 1983, the partnership was dissolved and Henry retained the headquarters, and soon after, his sons joined him in further developing and diversifying the operation. Yolo Land & Cattle Co. runs on deeded, leased and Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres that encompass more than 12,000 total acres. The cattle division includes cow-calf, stocker, and registered cattle. They also operate a farming division including rinse water management, and the production of wheat, corn and hay crops.

"Yolo Land and Cattle is very highly respected and is willing to try new ideas," says Nick Gallagher, a rangeland specialist with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). "They are some of the first pioneers to experiment with native grass seed and take the time to embrace the value of native plant restoration. Their knowledge and ability to adapt has allowed them to become great stewards of the land. Cattle graze according to a planned rotational grazing system that promotes rangeland health. The Stone family works to improve the land and leave it in better condition than when they received it."

"To manage their operation, the Stones have developed an evaluation process that asks a series of five questions to help determine the feasibility and environmental impact of the new projects," says Petty. "By answering these questions, the ranch can carefully determine the benefit of the project, educational value, research potential, economic viability and who can be involved in the implementation process. This evaluation process has served as a resource for other producers to use."

A sampling of the projects that Yolo Land & Cattle Co. has implemented include: a Vegetative

Management Plan (VMP), rotational grazing, grazing on CRP lands and invasive weed control. Partnering with the California Audubon Society and the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection created the largest VMP in the state of California for the purpose of conducting annual spring grass burns and fall brush burns on a total 45,000 acres.

“Through their cooperation and educational measures with the state government, the Stones have been able to utilize CRP land for grazing while maintaining their CRP status, which is unusual,” says Petty. “By educating these governing bodies about the importance of using CRP acres, they have also been able to open many more doors for themselves and fellow producers in California.”

The Stone family has a long tradition of conservation work with the Yolo County Resource Conservation District and with USDA’s NRCS, as well as many other agencies and conservation organizations. They also have a long tradition of opening up their ranch for tours and conservation education opportunities.

“Yolo Land & Cattle Co. has opened their gates, quite literally, to thousands of people,” says Mary Kimball, executive director of the Center for Land-Based Learning, “including high school students, researchers, government employees, resource professionals, and the public. To top it all off, in 2006 they created the largest rangeland easement in Yolo County – over 6,000 acres were placed under easement by the California Rangeland Trust.”

Important measures that have assisted Yolo Land & Cattle Co. in their forage production and conservation efforts have included the clearing of a 30-acre parcel that was plagued with erosion and invasive weed problems. After eight years of cultivating the land, the parcel is a lush riparian area with native perennial vegetation, currently used a testing site for controlling annual grasses and invasive weeds. Carbon sequestration has been another focus of the Stones. Partnering with NRCS, UC Davis and USDA’s Agricultural Research Service, the goal of the project is to measure the amount of carbon that is stored in the roots of perennial grasses and compare it to the amount of carbon stored in the roots of annual grasses. Upon test results, this data could greatly assist Yolo Land & Cattle Co. and fellow producers to diversify their operation.

“Rarely does one get to work with a family of farmers and ranchers as knowledgeable, progressive, and pleasant as the Stones,” says Stephen Jaouen, NRCS Range Management Specialist. “They have been an advocate of the environment and stewards of the land by pushing the conservation envelope on everything from native grass establishment, livestock pond enhancement, and prescribed fire.”

The Environmental Stewardship Award Program is administered by the NCBA and sponsored by Dow AgroSciences LLC and the Natural Resources Conservation Service of USDA. The 2007 National Winner will be selected from one of the 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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