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Conservation district backer honored with award nomination

By HEATHER HACKING - Staff Writer



Pat and Sharon Gore walk along the driveway to their Nelson home Thursday. Sharon has been nominated for a statewide award for her efforts to begin a Resource Conservation District in Butte County. (Bill Husa/Enterprise-Record)

All Chico E-R photos are available [here](#).

Sharon Gore and her husband, Pat, have run their rice fields and almond orchards with long-term protection of soil, water and wildlife in mind. Their son Stacy is the fifth generation of the Gore family to work the land, and it is hoped more generations will prosper from farming.

Some examples are using beneficial insects as their primary control of mites and navel orange worm, precision farming, electric water pumps and spraying at night to avoid disrupting birds.

When Sharon Gore learned that forming a Butte County Resource Conservation District could help other landowners learn about conservation-minded practices they could put in place, with financial help from resource agencies, she was determined to help the county form one.

Ultimately, she and others who joined the effort were successful. As a thank you for her work, the board of the RCD honored Gore by nominating her for a prestigious statewide award.

Gore explained that when the level of wells dropped in 1994, her farm on the Cherokee strip was harmed. She got active with others who wanted to start the Cherokee Watershed Group.

Her daughter Andrea told her about a meeting in Glenn County for the Stonyford Watershed Group. Gore decided to attend the meeting to help her learn more to apply to the Cherokee group.

Gore said she was "blown away" by what she learned about people replanting native vegetation, fencing stock ponds on rangeland and other conservation practices.

The projects she learned about wouldn't have happened without the Glenn County Resource Conservation District.

"It was just amazing. All this work was going on (to improve conservation) and I was oblivious to it," Gore said.

But Butte County did not have an RCD.

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That's when she got in gear to drum up support to change that.

"I wrote a lot of articles for different newsletters and did presentations. Linden Brooks, area conservationist for (Natural Resource Conservation Service), gave us a video I could take and show people," Gore explained.

And because Gore was so active with so many groups over the years, she knew a lot of places to peddle the concept.

Sharon and her husband both have served on numerous water and farm-related groups.

Gore contacted the Butte County Board of Supervisors, Butte County Farm Bureau, UC Cooperative Extension, and California Women in Agriculture.

Her longtime involvement with the League of Women voters helped to set up forums where the public could learn more about what RCD could provide.

Support came from the Butte County Fire Safe Council, California Department of Fire and Forestry Protection, The Nature Conservancy, Butte Environmental Council, Butte County Farm Bureau, Butte Sutter Groundwater Users Association and the Cherokee Watershed Alliance,

"This is the strength of the RCD," said Butte County RCD district manager Pia Sevelius said. "It needs to be locally-driven -- not government, not a consultant -- the people themselves are driving it."

The county had tried to form an RCD twice before, but had failed due to local fears that it would lead to more government overlay.

Sevelius said many public agencies were pushing for a local RCD, but Gore's efforts were above and beyond.

The vote passed by only 1 percent, but that was enough to create the RCD in Butte County.

Now, four years later, the RCD has worked with various funding agencies to garner \$600,000 in grants and contracts. The RCD has also helped Butte County property owners apply for voluntary conservation programs that have awarded \$4 million to property owners of 60,000 acres.

Gore said she sees so many possibilities for the use of the Resource Conservation District. She'd like to see cattle ranchers get more involved to work toward improvements on their ranches. There are fire hazard projects that can be done.

"There's a zillion things you can do. It's just getting a focus and finding projects and landowners that it takes to make that happen," she said.

The Resource Conservation District recently nominated Gore for the Leopold Conservation Award, awarded by the Sand County Foundation, California Farm Bureau Federation and Sustainable Conservation.

The award honors producers of certain crops who have demonstrated "responsible and sustainable land management, economics, innovation, overall land health, and community outreach and leadership."

Millions of dollars have passed through to local landowners, something that wouldn't have been possible without the RCD, Gore said.

And in Sevelius' mind, and in the minds of the board members who nominated her for the award, it wouldn't have been possible without Sharon Gore.

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