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Rickert Family recognized for North State conservation effort

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Mary and Jim Rickert

Photo courtesy of California Farm Bureau Federation

The Prather Ranch, a 34,000-acre network of cattle ranches and agricultural land in Northern California managed by Jim and Mary Rickert and their son James, was recently named as one of five finalists for the 2007 Leopold Conservation Award. Named for the world-renowned conservationist Aldo Leopold, the $10,000 award is presented annually in California, Utah, Colorado, Wyoming, Nebraska, and Texas to private landowners who practice exemplary land stewardship and management.

One of the Rickert Family's local operations is the 2,240-acre Fenwood Ranch at the mouth of Cow Creek on the Sacramento River, and James Rickert was recently elected to the Board of Directors of the Cow Creek Watershed Management Group. His grandparents own the Rickert Ranch on Little Cow Creek in Bella Vista. In the next few months James plans to move into his great grandfather's house on that ranch.

According to a press release we received with the list of Leopold Award finalists, the Rickert Family has a long history of wildlife habitat conservation on all of their ranches. They have signed conservation agreements to safeguard the vernal pools and riparian zones on the Fenwood Ranch and to preserve wildflowers on a ranch in Colusa County. They have also planted more than eight miles of riparian habitat that benefits both the California Quail and the Valley Elderberry Longhorn Beetle along streams and irrigation canals. At their ranches in the Fall River Valley, they till the rice stubble into the soil and keep the fields covered in water year-round, providing valuable habitat for migrating waterfowl.

A fourth generation Shasta County agriculturist, James Rickert grew up in Fall River and graduated from Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo. He is now employed by the family

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business, Western Agricultural Services, an agricultural management company whose largest component is the Prather Ranch. Rickert explained that the Prather Ranch is a “vertically integrated beef operation that raises animals for both beef and pharmaceutical products.” The ranch supplies bovine tissues to pharmaceutical companies, which make bovine collagen as well as bone and tendon replacement tissues.

The Prather Ranch is probably best known for its production of certified organic and natural beef. The ranch has its own meat processing facility at the Prather Ranch Headquarters in MacDoel, where James and his father Jim “work side by side on the processing room floor at each slaughter.” The beef is cut and packaged on site and shipped to distributors in the Bay Area. Prather Ranch natural beef is sold locally at Kent’s Meats on Airport Road.

In 2004, James initiated the first certified organic strawberry nursery in the United States. “We are the only producers of strawberry plants that do not use methyl bromide to fumigate the fields,” he said. This year he grew two million plants on six acres and shipped them to growers as far away as Florida and Louisiana.

In California, the Sand County Foundation, the California Farm Bureau Federation and Sustainable Conservation present the Leopold Conservation Award jointly. The award was presented to Yolo County walnut farmer Craig McNamara on Monday at the annual meeting of the California Farm Bureau Federation in Sparks.

Reviews

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