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Monday, January 07, 2008

12/14/2007 6:00:00 AM

[Email this article](#) • [Print this article](#)[Comment on this article](#)**Farmers link stewardship with economic success***Farmers protect the environment and restore wildlife habitat***Ashley Boren & Brent Haglund**

The recent presentation of the 2007 Leopold Conservation Award to Craig McNamara and his 450-acre walnut farm, Sierra Orchards, affirms the crucial role that California farmers and ranchers play in protecting the environment and restoring wildlife habitat while they feed vast numbers of people around the nation and the world.

Sierra Orchards is a diversified farming operation that demonstrates both stewardship and prosperity, integrating habitat-conserving practices with the bottom line.

It produces organic walnuts and grape rootstock, among other crops, on 450 acres. Craig McNamara utilizes tried- and-true organic farming practices as well as the most recent technological advances.

His proactive investment in tail water ponds, sediment traps and hedgerow plantings helps ensure that no irrigated or natural water is wasted. He hangs more than 40,000 pheromone devices each year to control codling moth pests.

He even uses composted table scraps from San Francisco restaurants as fertilizer. Sierra Orchard's organic walnut production and sales have steadily increased, demonstrating the integral relationship between economic success and sustained conservation.

With an eye toward the future, McNamara has committed himself and Sierra Orchards to helping high school students become lifelong learners, overcome barriers to change, develop leadership skills and build greater human and social capital in their communities. Based at Sierra Orchards, the Center for Land-Based Learning reaches more than 2,000 California students annually to learn about sustainable agriculture first-hand.

With more than half of California's land in private hands, the day-to-day practices of private landowners - particularly farmers and ranchers working with the land - are crucial to environmental health.

When farmers, ranchers, and timber producers see that it is in their own long-term best interest to be conservative with their natural resources, we have very good news for conservation. Sierra Orchards fulfills this expectation.

Aldo Leopold wrote, "Conservation is a state of harmony between men and land." He believed that farmers and ranchers were well-suited and situated to understand how to nurture the land that gives so much back to them.

His perspective is at least as important today as it was in the 1930s and 1940s. Agricultural lands are at risk of becoming home sites and shopping malls. The environmental and health consequences of imprudent farming and ranching have become clearly evident.

For this year's Leopold Conservation Award in California, Craig McNamara and Sierra Orchards provide a living example of agriculture that is as healthy for wildlife as it is for the farmer.

The question is, how many other California farmers, ranchers, and timber producers will actively and voluntarily seek the kind of harmonious relationship with the land and the wildlife that Aldo Leopold advocated? How many will take this point of view and embed conservation practices into their operations?

We recognize that attitudes in California agriculture are changing. Increasingly, farmers and ranchers are finding practical ways to provide habitat for wildlife and clean water for their communities while they sustain a healthy business.

They are making smart choices that are environmentally and economically sound.

In presenting the Leopold Conservation Award to an exemplary California farm family, we hope these success stories will grow and multiply in every corner of the state and across the nation.

On behalf of the presenting partners - Sand County Foundation, Sustainable Conservation and California Farm Bureau - we congratulate Craig McNamara and the four outstanding finalists.

*Ashley Boren is executive director of Sustainable Conservation. Brent Haglund is president of Sand County Foundation.*

The Leopold Conservation Award is presented by Sand County Foundation in six states. The California partners are Sustainable Conservation and California Farm Bureau Federation. Learn more at [www.leopoldconservationaward.org](http://www.leopoldconservationaward.org).

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