



CALIFORNIA FARM BUREAU FEDERATION



Commentary: Leopold Award recognizes farmers' stewardship work

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By Brent M. Haglund

Renowned conservationist Aldo Leopold, author of the classic book *A Sand County Almanac*, wrote that, "The landscape of any farm is the owner's portrait of himself. Conservation implies self-expression in that landscape." Farmers and ranchers across California, in the spirit of Leopold, take great pride in the enhancement of their landscapes and more needs to be done to celebrate their outstanding achievements. Sand County Foundation's Leopold Conservation Award exists to provide this sort of recognition to motivated agricultural producers who are also conservation leaders.

All too often, ranchers and farmers are criticized as abusers of the land, rather than praised as conservationists who continually improve our nation's land, water and wildlife. These leaders not only provide food and fiber to the nation's citizens, but they provide, at low cost, an array of environmental amenities, such as clean water, open space, wildlife habitat and recreation, while going largely unnoticed by the public. Their work is done in the face of increasing threats from rising property valuations, episodic drought, wildfire and invasive species.

Private landowners are the engines that drive modern conservation. Farming and ranching families across the United States have realized that economic and environmental success often go hand in hand. There is no shortage of these landowners in California, which makes us proud to enter into a fifth consecutive year in our successful partnership with the California Farm Bureau Federation and Sustainable Conservation to present the Leopold Conservation Award. The award recognizes individuals and families who demonstrate enduring and outstanding conservation leadership on their land and in their communities.

One simply needs to look at the previous winners of the Leopold Conservation Award in California to realize that improvements to grassland, water quality and wildlife habitat can contribute to a successful agricultural operation.

Brad and Randy Lange, who won the inaugural award in California in 2006, emphasize habitat restoration and water quality management, as well as renewable energy production and innovative pest management practices. Craig McNamara, the award winner in 2007, is dedicated to ensuring that younger generations don't suffer from "nature deficit disorder." He founded the Center for Land-Based Learning, which teaches more than 2,000 high school students each year about sustainable agriculture. Chet Vogt, the award winner in 2008, helped forge several effective partnerships between the ranching industry and environmental organizations. Last year's winner, John Diener, developed a method to clean salt from the soil and water, upon discovering that some of his land was incapable of growing crops due to high salt levels.

A critical question is: How can these families' responsible approach to agriculture be expanded? One way is through communication. The Leopold Conservation Award gives landowners a forum to discuss conservation and agricultural issues within their respective states.

Since its inception in 2003, 30 families have won the Leopold Conservation Award in seven states: California, Colorado, Nebraska, Texas, Utah, Wisconsin and Wyoming. We believe that shining a bright light



on an individual's or family's accomplishments each year recognizes the work of all of the agricultural leaders in California and nationwide whose love and dedication for the land goes, all too often, unnoticed. We need the benefits they produce.

Leopold wrote that, "Conservation is a state of harmony between men and land." He believed that farmers and ranchers were best suited to understand how to nurture the land that gives so much back to them. His perspective is as important today as it was during the 1930s and 1940s.

You likely know someone who deserves to be recognized in this manner. I ask that you take the time to honor their achievements by nominating them for a Leopold Conservation Award. The 2010 deadline for nominations is July 12. You will help to ensure that agricultural and environmental success continues to flourish in California and across our great nation.

Leopold Conservation Award

Nominations for the Leopold Conservation Award will be considered in two categories: Livestock or Nurseries and Crops. Judges will select a finalist in each category and the winner of the \$10,000 award will be announced next December at the California Farm Bureau Federation Annual Meeting in Monterey. For more information, please see www.leopoldconservationaward.org, e-mail suscon@suscon.org or call 415-977-0380.

(Brent M. Haglund is president of the Sand County Foundation of Monona, Wisc., an organization dedicated to working with private landowners to improve habitat on their land.)

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