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Farmer, ranchers finalists for award

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A rice farmer and two ranching families are finalists to receive an environmental stewardship award from the California Farm Bureau Federation and two conservation organizations.

Third-generation rancher Tim Koopmann, of Sunol, rice grower Alfred G. Montna, of Yuba City, and Red Bluff area ranchers Bill and Kay Burrows are being considered for the Leopold Conservation Award.

The winner will be honored during the state Farm Bureau's annual meeting Dec. 6 in Monterey. The award is cosponsored by the Sand County Foundation and Sustainable Conservation, two environmental groups.

"These are folks who are not only doing just great, innovative conservation on their land," said Kevin Kiley, a spokesman for the Sand County Foundation. "What sets these folks apart is they look beyond the borders of their ranches and farms and are really involved in their communities."

California is one of eight states in which a Leopold award is given. The award, named in honor of conservationist Aldo Leopold, includes a \$10,000 prize to the winner.

Koopmann, who runs a cow-calf operation on 850 acres in Alameda County, has used conservation easements to maintain his land in the face of ongoing development in the San Francisco Bay area, according to a Farm Bureau news release.

His watershed management practices have helped improve water quality in the Alameda Creek watershed as well as the San Francisco Bay, the release states.

Montna has created extensive habitat for waterfowl and other wildlife throughout his 2,500-acre farming operation while finding alternatives to burning rice stubble and reducing pesticide runoff into the Sacramento River by 90 percent, according to the Farm Bureau.

The Burrows ranch, which runs cattle, meat goats and sheep, diversifies its operation by hosting hunting and fishing tours. The family also hosts an annual "Stewardship Day" where local residents and agency officials learn about resource management.

Candidates for the award have consistently developed innovative ways to "make a healthy environment go hand-in-hand with a healthy farm economy," said Ashley Boren, executive director of Sustainable Conservation, which has co-sponsored the award since 2006.

"This year is no different," she said in an e-mail. "We congratulate the 2010 finalists for their 'everybody wins' approach to conservation across both rural and urban landscapes, diverse farming and ranching operations, and a unique mix of stewardship practices that promote clean water, clean air and abundant wildlife."

-- Tim Hearnden

Online

Leopold Conservation Award: www.leopoldconservationaward.org

Sand County Foundation: www.sandcounty.net

Sustainable Conservation: www.suscon.org


California Farm Bureau Federation: www.cfbf.com

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