

Profiles in CONSERVATION

Farmers recognized for stewardship of natural resources

A vision for the future, combined with a passion to accomplish things today, characterizes these farmers who have been recognized for their creative approaches to caring for California's natural resources.

"I've always felt it was the responsibility of a rancher and landowner to take care of the land for the next generation," Bob Giacomini said.

Giacomini, of Marin County, is winner of the 2013 Leopold Conservation Award, which recognizes landowner achievements in voluntary conservation and pub-

lic education. In California, the award is presented by the Sand County Foundation, California Farm Bureau Federation and Sustainable Conservation, with the S.D. Bechtel Jr. Foundation and the Nature Conservancy acting as major sponsors.

Stephen Pedersen and Jeanne Byrne of Santa Cruz County and John and Gail Kautz of San Joaquin County were finalists for the 2013 award. All have committed to stewardship and sustained economic viability while also being innovative and active in their communities.

Winners of the 2013 Leopold Conservation Award



"Our land has been very good to us and we consider it our duty and honor to return the favor."

— BOB GIACOMINI

Bob Giacomini and Family

Robert Giacomini Dairy
Point Reyes Farmstead Cheese
Marin County

For the Giacomini family, the coastal community of Point Reyes has been home for nearly half a century. Bob Giacomini and his family own and operate the Robert Giacomini Dairy. In 2000, they opened the Point Reyes Farmstead Cheese Co., which brought all four of his daughters—Jill, Karen, Lynn and Diana—back to the farm to help in the growing family business.

All the milk for their artisan cheeses comes from about 300 cows that graze in the countryside at the family's 700-acre dairy. Believing the quality of the milk and cheese starts with the grass, the family has committed to careful land management. The farm is certified organic and uses rotational grazing, which keeps grasses and soils healthy, as well as no-till practices on all fields, so the natural fertilizer can absorb into the soil without runoff while decreasing erosion.

"Because it says 'farmstead' on the label, it means it comes from our land," Giacomini said, "so we are deeply committed to caring for the land."

One of the biggest challenges any dairy has is managing wastewater. In 2009, the Giacominis installed a methane digester that converts methane gas—a byproduct of manure—into useable energy that powers the dairy and cheese plant. They also compost their solid manure and sell some to a local compost company that in turn sells it to nurseries and other farmers.

"Our land has been very good to us and we consider it our duty and honor to return the favor," Giacomini said.

Bob Giacomini reinvented his family's dairy business with the help of his daughters, from left, Jill Basch, Diana Hagan, Lynn Stray and Karen Howard.



John and Gail Kautz

Kautz Farms • San Joaquin County

If you were to list all of John Kautz's accomplishments in his 60-plus years in agriculture, it would take pages. But to list what makes him most proud at his farm these days requires only a phrase: building a sustainable farm to be passed down to a future generation.

"My greatest pleasure is in working with family, and where we're all working towards the same goal," Kautz said. "My legacy will live on through them."

Kautz and his wife Gail have

raised four children, all of whom play integral roles in the family businesses. The Kautz family owns and operates more than 5,000 acres of vineyards in Lodi and the Sierra foothills, with many of the winegrapes going to its Ironstone Winery in Murphys.

In his vineyards, Kautz was a pioneer in the implementation of water-saving drip irrigation. Starting in 1970, he also pioneered use of integrated pest management, using natural enemies to

combat destructive insects.

Most recently, Kautz built a water recycling project that naturally treats wastewater from the winery. The purified water can be applied to irrigate fields. He said he hopes other farms could implement the system and adapt it to their needs.

The more people know about the actions farmers take to conserve natural resources, Kautz said, the more "they'll really appreciate the farmers of California."

Stephen Pedersen and Jeanne Byrne

High Ground Organics • Santa Cruz County


As family farmers, Stephen Pedersen and Jeanne Byrne have always believed in taking care of the land.

The couple own and operate High Ground Organics, a 38-acre farm in Watsonville. They grow organic fruits and vegetables sold through a community-supported agriculture program and at local farmers markets.

Half of their land is protected under an agricultural easement, which keeps it in farmland, prohibits development and also requires that it be managed organically forever.

"We both consider this a lifetime project to improve the land and the farm, so that we can pass it on someday," Byrne said.

In addition to generating fresh, organic crops, Byrne and Pedersen have recognized and welcomed an abundance of wildlife that resides on the farm and in a nearby slough. The farm sits atop Harkins Slough, a vast wetlands area on which many species depend for habitat. In order to protect the sensitive habitat of the slough, the hillsides that lead to it have been placed in a conservation easement, which means they can't be farmed or developed.

"We believe in protecting the biodiversity and consider it a privilege to be able to care for the land here," Pedersen said. "We wouldn't want to farm any other way." 

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