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Landowner Profile: Scott Stone of Yolo Land and Cattle Company

by Kate Laddish

In the hills of western Yolo County, Scott Stone and his family run a unique cattle ranch where they put their conservation values and beliefs into action. At the 26-year-old Yolo Land and Cattle Company, Scott and his family use a variety of conservation practices to raise their valuable herd of natural grass-fed beef.

Scott attributes many of their conservation practices to his father being “very progressive . . . and real open-minded.” The Stones learned about conservation from other landowners and from trade journals. For Scott, joining the Yolo County RCD’s Board of Directors was a real turning point, as his involvement keeps him up-to-date on pertinent conservation practices.

“Little Oases All Around the Ranch”

One of the conservation methods the Stones use is the fencing off of riparian pastures to minimize the direct impact their cattle have on streams. While many ranchers use ponds as direct water sources for herd, (which leads to trampled ground, foul water, little vegetation, and even less wildlife), the Stones have fenced off some of their ponds and use solar-powered pumps to move water from ponds into storage tanks where the water gravity flows out to livestock troughs. Consequently, the cattle drink better water and the remaining pond water is more palatable to area wildlife.

Working with the Yolo County RCD, the NRCS, Audubon California, and SLEWS (Student and Landowner Education and Watershed Stewardship), the Stones have

overseen planting of native shrubs, grasses, and trees around the ponds, creating valuable wildlife habitat which Scott sees as “little oases all around the ranch.” Rotational grazing, which reduces cattle’s impact on any given plot of land, is also an important tool at Yolo Land and Cattle, as is prescribed burning. Scott asserts that fire is a “tremendous way to put nature back into the cycle . . . [it] is a very important tool in weed and brush control. It’s the way things evolved.”

“Time and Money Well-Spent”

According to Scott, governmental, environmental, and zoning regulations make California the hardest place to do business in the U.S. Scott reports that for farmers and ranchers, the situation is particularly difficult because:

in agriculture . . . [y]ou produce a crop and you take whatever price they give you at the end of the year, good or bad . . . It should be like any other industry where you produce a product that people want to buy. Here’s what it costs you to produce it, you add on what you want to make for profit and that’s what you sell it for.

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Important Dates:

Feb. 19 - Sediment Traps & Tailwater Ponds Workshop
9-11 a.m. (contact the RCD for location)
Feb. 28 - EQIP signup deadline
March 19 - Rural Roadside Vegetation Workshop
9-11 a.m. (contact the RCD for location)

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Despite these hurdles, the Stones treat their land in accordance with their beliefs. Scott's goal as a rancher is to produce excellent beef cattle and to make their ranch a better place. It's a tricky balance though between making a living as a rancher and conserving the land. For the Stones, part of the answer lies in selling to consumers educated about food and its production.

Most beef cattle in the U.S. live in pens or feed lots and are corn-fed, thereby requiring large amounts of antibiotics. Corn-fed cattle yields beef with marbling, which Americans have historically prized. Now, however, a growing number of consumers want leaner beef and are willing to pay more for grass-fed beef raised in an ecologically-sensitive manner. Scott notes that although the price of quality grass-fed beef is higher than average, customers are willing to pay for the higher quality and the knowledge of how the beef is produced.

Asked if implementing conservation practices has taken a financial toll, Scott explains that the conservation "has taken a lot of time and money away from other projects, but we're trying to leave this place better than how we found it, and over the long run [the stewardship] increases the value of the ranch and makes it a nicer place for the cattle, the wildlife, and the people. I think it's time and money well spent."

Any Advice?

Scott suggests that anyone interested in implementing similar conservation measures should "talk to a neighbor who's done this and go talk to the experts at the NRCS and the RCD. It doesn't cost you anything to have them come out and [assess] your situation." Scott also points out that the NRCS EQIP program provides cost-sharing of up to 75%, allowing landowners to implement projects that would otherwise be financially impossible.

It's Your Choice

According to Scott, both consumers and landowners make choices that affect the land and the manner in which food is produced. Some people chose a product based on the cost. "That's fine," says Scott, "our product is not for them." On the other hand, producers must decide what type of operation they want to run. "I don't want to produce a product I don't want to eat . . . We want to do the best job we can and do it the best way. I want to produce a product I feel good about producing and eating . . . that grass-fed [beef] has just got such a good flavor and it's better for you." ☞

New Riparian Edge Hedgerows and Other Native Plantings

The Yolo County RCD recently planted native trees, shrubs, forbs, and grasses at two locations along the edge of Union School Slough: off County Road 96, north of County Road 27, and near the southern end of County Road 92D. Additional plantings of native trees, grasses and sedges will be completed near Union School Slough to fill in and enhance plantings that were started two years ago on a small sheep ranch. These plantings would not have been possible without the RCD's partnership with the SLEWS (Student and Landowner Education in Watershed Stewardship) Program (part of FARMS Leadership, Inc.). Through this program, local (usually high school), students integrate classroom studies of local resource management and conservation with repeated visits to sites such as these riparian hedgerow plantings and participate in the work while getting to know the landowner. The goal of the program is to provide habitat for various wildlife forms and enhance some aspects of farming without interfering with normal agricultural practices. ☞

Yolo County Weed Management Area (YCWMA) Update:

This fall the YCWMA applied for grant funds to continue work on the removal of perennial pepperweed at specific sites within the county. Spring should bring a reply.

The Davis Bike Path: A one-mile section of the Davis Bike Path between County Roads 97 and 96 has historically been troublesome for many area cyclists. The troublemaker is Puncturevine (*Tribulus terrestris*), an annual weed from Southern Europe, that produces hard, spiny, flat-tire inducing seeds. Through the YCWMA, specific control measures have been taken to reduce the Puncturevine population along the path and to allow for revegetation with native perennial bunchgrasses. After two years of intensive weed control, the site was reseeded with native grasses in early December. In mid-January, the YCWMA planted plugs and additional grasses along steep sections of the path. Volunteers are always welcome to help in these efforts. If you are interested or would like to find out about YCWMA's next meeting, call Jenny at 530.662.2037 ext. 114. ☞

Watershed Program Update

Vance Howard, the RCD's Watershed Coordinator has been very busy. Vance made the final edits to the *Capay Valley Conservation and Restoration Manual* in November. The group celebrated the completion of the manual, a long-time goal of the Cache Creek Watershed Stakeholders Group, at the general group meeting in November.

The 130-page manual provides guidance for landowners hoping to protect and enhance the natural resources on their land. The manual contains step-by-step instructions for 30 conservation and restoration practices, including erosion, invasive plants, and wildlife habitat. Through a grant from the CALFED Watershed Program, the manual is free to Capay Valley landowners. Manuals may also be purchased from the Yolo County RCD for \$15.00 plus tax.

With Paul Robins, Vance also provided assistance to the Cache Creek Watershed Stakeholders Group this fall in their effort to develop a watershed plan for Capay Valley. The Stakeholders Group identified resources issues and developed goals for the watershed plan. At their January 16th meeting, the group began to outline objectives and recommend actions for each one. The group hopes to have the watershed plan completed by next fall.

Armed with the Capay Valley Conservation and Restoration Manual, many stakeholders are anxious to get started on projects, and they will be looking to the watershed plan as the vehicle that will guide their conservation and restoration efforts. ☞

Congratulations Jeanette!

Congratulations to Jeanette Wrynski of the Yolo County RCD for her well-deserved **District Employee of the Year** award in recognition of her obvious dedication, endless hard work and unwavering commitment to conservation and the efforts of the RCD. Jeanette was selected for this award from among all the employees of the state's 103 RCDs and was honored in November at the CARCD Annual Conference in Redding. ☞

One Year Completed on RCD Watershed Project

The Yolo County RCD completed the first of a three-year project designed to study and help improve the natural resource conditions within Union School Slough. This part-natural, part-altered waterway drains land in the western part of Yolo County from Edgar Peak eastward toward the Yolo Bypass, roughly between County Roads 27 and 29. Parts of Union School Slough are also known as the "Pleasant Prairie Canal."

During this first year the RCD, along with its USDA Agricultural Research Service partners, established a location for focused studies on the effects of conservation tillage and cover cropping on soil and water quality and conditions. The RCD provided free flashboard risers to several landowners for the installation of sediment traps to improve the quality of water that drains into the slough. To evaluate sediment and nutrient fluxes over the changing seasons and their relationship to the cycling of nutrients in active farming systems, numerous plant, water, and soil samples were collected from the watershed.

Additionally, groundbreaking work was completed on the development of a web-based conservation planning aid that individual landowners can use to develop their own conservation plans. Work will continue on this project through the summer of 2004. If you would like more information on prior or upcoming projects, call Project Manager Jeanette Wrynski at 530.662.2037, ext. 118. ☞

Free Flashboard Risers

As part of the Union School Slough Watershed Program, the Yolo County RCD will purchase and provide FREE flashboard risers to landowners within the Union School Slough watershed for installing sediment traps. See the article above for the approximate watershed boundaries. During the previous year, the typical size riser purchased for landowners was 30" wide by 3-4' tall, along with extension pipe. If interested, call Jeanette Wrynski at 530.662.2037, ext 118. ☞



Welcome Vance Russell

We are pleased to announce that Audubon California recently hired Vance Russell as Program Manager of the Willow Slough Watershed Stewardship Program. Vance replaced Judy Boshoven when she departed for Chile at the end of January. Vance said "I'm very much looking forward to meeting and working with local landowners. The program's objective of combining economically viable agriculture with wildlife-friendly farming practices is a model for private land stewardship in California and the nation. I am honored to be part of such a successful program thanks in large part to participating landowners, Audubon California, FARMS Leadership Inc., and the Yolo RCD."

Working with agriculture and conservation has been a lifelong pursuit for Vance as he grew up in a farming community and worked as an agriculture extensionist for the Peace Corps in Bolivia and Honduras. He is on the steering committee of the Wild Farm Alliance, a non-profit organization that promotes wildlife-friendly agriculture at the farm and ecosystem scales.

Audubon's Willow Slough Watershed Stewardship Program, funded by CALFED through August 2004, provides ranchers in the watershed with the technical and financial assistance to implement wildlife-friendly projects. They are currently planning projects for riparian and grassland restoration for implementation in 2003.

Please call Vance at 530.795.2921 or e-mail him at russell@yolorcd.org for more information. ☞

Yolo County RCD Publications

The Yolo County RCD offers the following items for sale. To place an order, send your request to **Yolo County RCD - Orders, 221 W. Court Street, Suite 1, Woodland, CA 95695**; call us at **530.662.2037, ext. 119**; or send an e-mail to **mccloud@yolorcd.org**. Tax and shipping and handling charges must be added to the price of the item(s) as listed below.

- Know Your Natives; A Pictorial Guide to California Native Grasses\$25
- Bring Farm Edges Back to Life!\$15
- California Native Grass (poster)\$17
- Monitoring on Your Farm\$15
- Establishing a Hedgerow (video)\$9

Shipping & handling:

(no charge if item is purchased on site)

- 1 item: \$3.00
- 2-5 items: \$5.00
- 6-10 items: \$10.00
- more than 10 items: \$15.00



Kid's Corner

Can you match the animal and his tracks?

1. lizard
 2. raccoon
 3. bear
 4. wolf
 5. rabbit
 6. deer
 7. bird
 8. turtle
-

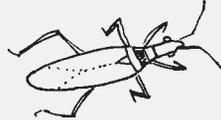
O.P.P.R
OO
raccoon
O

Thank you to 5-year-old **Eugene Long** for sending us his track drawing!

Answer: 1-C, 2-G, 3-A, 4-F, 5-D, 6-B, 7-H, 8-E

Yolo Service Center

Office Hours: 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
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If you would prefer to receive this via email, please contact Sue McCloud at mccloud@yolorcd.org

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Find project progress reports, events, links, and updated conservation articles on the RCD website at www.yolorcd.org