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Marc Faye & El Dorado Ranch - Orchards, Crops, Open Land & Rare Riparian Habitat

by Kate Laddish

Along with his brother Peter and son Eric, Marc Faye runs El Dorado Ranch in northern Yolo County. Adjacent to the Sacramento River, 1,200-acre El Dorado Ranch has a combination of orchards and row crops—and 200 acres of extremely rare riparian habitat. Like many farmers, the Fayes have to wage a constant economic battle to be able to work their land in the way they see best. Although they already have some well-established conservation practices, the Fayes are interested in implementing additional methods. The Fayes are also challenged to find an economically feasible way to protect their stand of riparian forest.

Deep Roots

Marc's family has owned this land since Marc's grandfather bought it in 1917 as a young Norwegian-born, Hawaiian plantation owner. In 1946 Marc's father bought out the rest of the family's shares in El Dorado Ranch and became sole owner of the land. Marc and his brother Peter followed in their father's footsteps, as has Marc's son Eric.

Existing Conservation Measures

Thoughtful management of the land has also been passed along to each generation of Fayes. Marc's grandfather established a pheasant-hunting club. For years, the Fayes and the club have planted 500 birds over a 10-week period and have permitted hunting on their ranch. Although their rules permit up to 80% of the birds be shot, that figure has never passed 50%. Although he's not a hunter himself, Marc has continued to maintain the club and its practices.

The Fayes' most important conservation method is also the easiest—nothing at all. Two hundred of El Dorado's 1,200 acres have never been in production because they contain valuable habitat including 50 acres of increasingly rare riparian oak forest.

"Dad and I both loved this spot," says Marc, looking out the window of his truck at the golden autumn foliage. "It's a good place to come and think." The trick, says Marc, is to find the financial means to keep the oak grove intact. "We'd rather leave [the land] as it is but it's a real temptation to



try to get some use out of it. Dad and I used to joke about leveling this land and farming it. Once we ran the numbers, we realized we would spend more leveling than we would ever get back from farming." So what are their options? "If there's any way to make money on the land short of selling it, I'd like to do it. I haven't figured that out yet," shared Marc.

What Next?

While satisfied with the level of conservation El Dorado Ranch already enjoys, Marc sees opportunities to do more. Inspired by other landowners' methods, Marc is about to embark on a range of new projects. At a November 2002 RCD-sponsored field meeting on conservation methods, Marc asked the question to which everyone wanted an answer: How do you get started? Other landowners spoke about the information and financial help that the RCD and NRCS provided.

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As a result, Marc is now looking at his land, which includes orchards, row crops, open land, and riparian forest, with various land use ideas in mind. Because of the diversity of his property, Marc is considering ponds, hedgerows, and vegetated roadsides. He is also thinking of vegetating the sides of the dirt roads that cross the farm to suppress weeds and boost beneficial insect habitat.

Elsewhere in the county, the RCD and landowners have worked in concert to reshape rural roadsides and plant native grasses, shrubs, and trees. Marc may install hedgerows between or along the edges of fields and customize the hedgerow species to nurture the most effective beneficial insects for the adjacent crop.

Ponds

Marc also hopes to construct ponds at several sites on the property, including tail water return ponds to recapture and reuse irrigation runoff water and trap sediment carried in that water. He would also like to create some ponds primarily for their wildlife benefit.

This year for the first time, the Fayes flooded some of their fields for habitat and were thrilled with the results. The birds literally flocked to their land. On a bright November morning, hundreds of tundra swans and snow geese looked like drifts of snow in a shallow flooded field. "This is great," said Marc, grinning broadly. "This is the first year we've done this and just look at how many birds are out there!" If this success is any indication of what's to come, the Fayes should be well satisfied by the results of future conservation efforts.

"Nothing Else I'd Rather Do"

As the third of four generations who have worked this land, Marc is satisfied with his life's work. "I've spent every summer since I was thirteen or fourteen working on the ranch," he recalls. "It started with being given a shovel and my learning things from the bottom up. Then at that point in your twenties you have to ask what you're going to do in life. I couldn't think of anything else I'd rather do than what I was already doing." "And I still can't," he concluded. ☞

Audubon Developing Strategic Plan



Audubon's Landowner Stewardship Program is developing a three-year strategic plan for future guidance and fundraising. The plan's aim is to describe Audubon's future commitment to key partners such as the Yolo RCD and FARMS, and to continue riparian, wetland and grassland restoration on farms throughout the county. Audubon will continue to collaborate with landowners in such work and will work toward securing long-term funding to ensure financial viability of the program. Contact Vance Russell at 530.795.2921 or via email to russell@yolo.com if you are interested in reviewing or contributing to the plan. ☞

NEW VEGETATION MANAGEMENT EQUIPMENT FOR RENT OR HIRE

Want to plant or maintain a roadside or plot of native grass but lack the equipment? The RCD can assist you with specialized equipment for native planting and maintenance, including a harrow, seeder, and mower—all pullable by ATV.

Contact Jenny Drewitz at 662.2037, ext. 114 for more information on specifications and rates for rental or hire.



Ranch Water Quality Planning Short Course Offered in September

The recently increased attention on the non-point source pollution requirements of the Clean Water Act has brought rangelands and the ranches they support under increased scrutiny.

This September 18, 19 and 20th, UC Extension and USDA NRCS will be sponsoring the Ranch Water Quality Planning Short Course for Yolo and Solano Counties to assist ranchers in designing individual water quality plans. A plan will enable a rancher to provide documentation of efforts made to protect or improve water quality on his ranch.

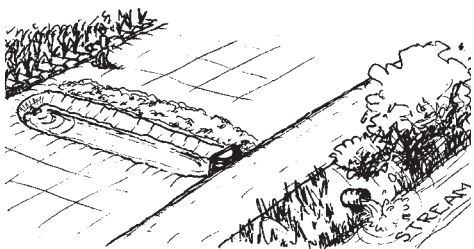
Both Yolo and Solano County residents are eligible for the course, which will cost approximately \$30 per person. Although announcements will be sent to local ranchers shortly, please feel free to call Morgan Doran at 707.435.2459 or Stephen Jaouen at 530.662.2037, ext. 115 for more information or to register. ☞



Proper Planning is a Must for Efficient Sediment Traps

Towards its goal of improving water quality, one of the Union School Slough Watershed program's ongoing activities has been installation of sediment traps. Through the three-year program, the RCD is providing 15 free flashboard risers to landowners in the watershed to use for installation of sediment traps at the lower ends of irrigated fields. The traps are intended to collect and slow down irrigation runoff water and allow the sediment to drop out instead of being carried off the field and into the drains and sloughs. A well-designed sediment trap serves this purpose well; if it's not designed well, however, it can actually *add* sediment to the water entering the slough.

Observations of the performance of numerous grower-installed sediment traps of varying shapes and sizes during the last few years reveal that most of them fill or nearly fill with sediment within the first few irrigations of the season. If not cleaned out mid-season, the drain water running through them may start to pick up the fine soil particles and carry them further down the drainage system. Most sediment traps are too small to perform correctly. They should be large enough to handle a full season's sediment capture — otherwise a landowner must clean out the trap mid-season. Since the traps rarely have the opportunity to dry in between irrigations, this can be a messy prospect, thereby decreasing the likelihood of its completion. The more convenient approach to effective sediment management is to design one that will do its intended job for the entire season and allow cleanout at a convenient time in the off-season.



Bird's eye view of a sediment trap



In-Field Water Management Evaluation Service Now 'On Tap'

After a year and a half of planning, the RCD is ready to launch its irrigation water management Mobile Lab for Yolo and Colusa Counties. In cooperation with water districts in both counties and the Colusa RCD, the RCD has received initial grant funds to support a project manager, Max Stevenson, purchase irrigation and water management monitoring tools, and fund small water management demonstration projects in the two counties. The "Mobile Lab" is an in-field evaluation service that is available to area farmers free of charge. Individual evaluations will require about one day of field work and a few hours of in-office processing. They will be tailored to the specific needs of those requesting the service, and will be available for a wide variety of irrigation systems and for those who are simply interested in better managing the water on their properties year-round. For more information or a service request, please contact Max Stevenson at 530.662.2037, ext. 120. ☞



RCD Annual Dinner Recognizes Cooperators of the Year and Sends Students Packing

About 80 people joined us at Nelson's Grove on May 15 for a hearty meal that provided opportunity to honor Yolo County Agricultural Commissioner Rick Landon and Deputy Ag Commissioner John Young for their leadership and initiative with the Yolo County Weed Management Area.

The event also featured a silent auction of items ranging from toy tractors and native plants to a private airplane ride, all to raise funds to send two local high school agricultural students to this year's annual Range and Resource Conservation Camp. The two select students, Ayla Barrow of Woodland H.S. and Amanda Abugosh of Esparto H.S., went on to distinguish themselves at the camp as the #1 and #2 returning students. As such, they received full scholarships to attend the National Youth Forum in Utah this coming year. ☞

Rural Roadside Assistance Program - 2 NEW Permits!

Two newly established permits now give Yolo County landowners the option to manage their own roadsides. One permit allows the landowner to maintain roadsides on the county right of way and has a single fee of \$110. The fee pays for county processing and "NO SPRAY" signs. The second permit gives the landowner permission to take over both roadside maintenance and to plant native grasses on the county right of way. The only fee accompanying this permit is \$20 per "NO SPRAY" sign and the RCD is available at no cost to help develop the native grass-planting plan.

All landowners with existing roadside native grass plantings must obtain a permit (at no cost) and will have to review the standards of care with an RCD employee to maintain the permit. The landowner's name and planting site will be maintained by the county to avoid accidental sprayings.

For a new NO SPRAY permit, contact Jim Campbell at Yolo County Planning and Public Works at 530.666.8847. For new EXISTING and NATIVE GRASS ROADSIDE permits, contact Jenny at the Yolo County RCD at 530.662.2037, ext. 114. ☞



Yolo County RCD Publications

The Yolo County RCD offers various 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 530.662.2037, ext. 119; or send an e-mail to mcloud@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
Working Habitat for Working Farms (video)	\$10
Yolo County Soil Survey (CD-ROM)	\$13.92

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



The RCD and the Ag Waiver

RCD Staff are actively supporting the Yolo County Farm Bureau's efforts to form watershed coalitions to aid area farmers' compliance with the new "Conditional Waiver of Waste Discharge Requirements for Discharges from Irrigated Lands." The RCD is committed to providing technical and educational support as grant funds allow and has submitted grant proposals to directly support the Farm Bureau and Dixon and Solano RCDs (for combined Yolo-Solano efforts) in this work. For more information on the RCD's role, contact Paul Robins at 530.662.2037, ext. 116 or Denise Sagara at the Yolo County Farm Bureau at 530.662-6316. ☞



Farmer-to-Farmer Cross Visits

Starting this fall, Audubon and the RCD will organize quarterly on-farm meetings with participating and interested landowners to discuss challenges surrounding long-term management of restoration projects, exchange ideas, and conduct mini-workshops on topics identified by the participants (i.e., increasing forage production in rangelands). The meetings will also feature themes according to season, such as weed control in late spring or supplemental planting in late fall/winter. Please contact Vance Russell at 530.795.2921 or by email to russell@yolo.com for more information. ☞



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