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Tony Turkovich's Natural View of Conservation

by Rebecca Bresnick Holmes

Conservation is nothing new to Tony Turkovich, part-owner and managing partner of Button & Turkovich. He considers conservation a logical and crucial part of successfully running a business. "Conservation, particularly in areas of irrigation and tillage, is simply part of the whole concept of being efficient – both economically and in terms of utilization of resources," says Mr. Turkovich.

The Button & Turkovich crop production is varied and includes processing tomatoes, wheat, corn, alfalfa, sunflower, prunes, vine seed, onion seed, and oranges. Because of the diversity of crops and his own willingness and interest, Mr. Turkovich is often able to experiment with new farming and conservation techniques. "If we were doing the same thing year after year," he explains, "I probably wouldn't be as enthusiastic about an agricultural occupation. The changes and challenges keep it interesting."

For nearly 20 years now, the Button & Turkovich ranch has practiced low till and more recently, no till, on many of its fields in an effort to save costs without hurting yield. Mr. Turkovich explains that the low or no till prac-

tice came about for many reasons, including financial. Reducing the number of passes over a field saves on tractor and equipment time, diesel fuel, and labor. It also



Pond on Button & Turkovich property.

helps reduce contributions to air pollution. As new equipment and techniques developed, Mr. Turkovich experimented to find out what worked for their farm and what didn't. Button & Turkovich also work with UC Davis on various projects in continued efforts to achieve more efficient farming using conservation methods.

One such project currently underway will help determine whether carbon sequestration is a benefit of no or low tillage. Mr. Turkovich hopes for results soon.

Drip irrigation is another conservation method that Button & Turkovich has worked with for nearly 20 years. Mr. Turkovich explains that it provides a more efficient and uniform water application and generally an increased yield. Like many aspects of farming, there are tradeoffs

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according to Mr. Turkovich. "Drip irrigation generally increases yields," he says, "but until recently hasn't saved on labor costs." Although this method uses less water it may be at a higher cost, as energy costs increase to pressure the systems, he explains. Mr. Turkovich hopes that with newer systems and materials, labor costs will be reduced to make drip irrigation more cost-effective. He has been monitoring such factors for nearly three years and is hopeful that results will soon show that their business can save money using their newest drip irrigation system.

Mr. Turkovich also adds that drip irrigation offers different options for tillage as well. "We don't have to have the furrow cleaned out for running irrigation water, for example, And," he adds, "with the Regional Water Quality Control issues, it's a benefit that there's no runoff or irrigation discharge."

Mr. Turkovich is also working on some projects with the Yolo County Resource Conservation District to create hedgerows along a half-mile-long stretch of sloughbank near County Road 96. Button & Turkovich is also involved in another tree and grass planting project of its own along Chickahominy Slough. Mr. Turkovich enjoys getting involved in this kind of work and appreciates seeing the native habitat and wildlife, especially the good wildlife that don't eat their crops. He has seen pheasants, wild turkeys, hawks, and sometimes golden eagles. He has also added owl and bat boxes to the property. Mr. Turkovich admits, however, that it's sometimes difficult to keep up with the conservation work, particularly in the busy farming season, given the time and effort it requires.

Mr. Turkovich also uses integrated pest management on his property. He and his staff scout the fields and don't apply materials unless they absolutely have to. Although it takes much more time than scheduled spraying, using the least amount and lowest toxicity of chemicals necessary and doing the extra work required to make that happen has always been part of Mr. Turkovich's philosophy. In addition to staff monitoring the fields, he uses a Pest Control Advisor. "The systems in place now require much more management time," Mr. Turkovich explains, "but we do these things now because it's worth it."

The Button & Turkovich property also includes a few tailwater ponds

that are currently being used as holding and sediment ponds. Button & Turkovich is working on future plans and waiting to see what the Regional Water Quality Control Board's regulations will be so that they can put in a system that will be approved and will best suit their needs as well.

When thinking about the future, Mr. Turkovich anticipates evolving



farm practices. Although he doesn't know what specific conservation techniques he might incorporate next, he knows that he will continue the trend to strive toward greater efficiency while disturbing nature as little as possible. Such practices are simply part of smart farming and good business according to Mr. Turkovich. ☞

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Free Irrigation & Water Quality Testing!

If you are a rural landowner, farmer, or irrigation district in Yolo or Colusa Counties, you qualify for free irrigation efficiency testing. Call Max Stevenson, the Yolo-Colusa Mobile Water Lab Manager, at 530.662.2037 x120.

RCD Wins Grants for Watershed Work

The California Department of Conservation awarded the RCD two Watershed Coordinator Grants totaling about \$400,000. The grants will support staff to work in Capay Valley and much of southern Yolo County through spring 2007.

Proposed work will include small watershed group coordination for landowners and other 'stakeholders,' development of a Permit Coordination program in Partnership with Sustainable Conservation, and landowner project support. Special emphasis will be placed on implementation of riparian weed management and restoration projects on Cache Creek and Willow Slough and their tributaries.

The US Fish & Wildlife Service awarded the RCD a \$20,000 "Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program" grant this year to implement a four-landowner grassed waterway and hedgerow project just north of Guinda in Capay Valley. The project will resolve overland flooding concerns of the landowners and enhance wildlife habitat on their properties and should take two years to complete. The SLEWS Program will partner in its implementation. This project was recently featured in the May/June issue of *California Country Magazine*.

A California Integrated Waste Management Board "Farm and Ranch Cleanup Grant" is funding projects on ranches in Hungry Hollow and Rumsey. The cleanup work, already complete on one site and underway on the second, will be followed with simple grass and shrub revegetation projects. ☞

Weed Management Area Update

May was a busy month out at Grasslands Regional Park in Davis. A 120-acre prescribed burn that had been in the planning stages for two years finally came to fruition! The burn was employed to help control the noxious grassland weeds, such as Medusahead and Barbed goatgrass, that had been invading the park.

Grasslands Regional Park is a haven for several rare grassland plants and animals associated with seasonal ponds known as vernal pools. Clearing the tons of dead vegetation through burning opened up areas for vernal pool species to thrive.



Grasslands Regional Park prescribed burn in progress May 2004.

Grasslands Park is also home to several hundred oak trees planted by local volunteers. Although some oak trees located within the burn area may sustain some damage from the burn, most of the acreage planted with oaks was set aside in 'no-burn' areas. Now, both vernal pool and oak species have homes at Grasslands Park.

This project was an exemplary demonstration of the local collaboration that is fundamental to the Yolo County Weed Management Area. Participants included several staff members from Yolo County Planning and Public Works, City of Davis Fire Department, UC Davis Fire Department, City of West Sacramento Fire Department, Yolo County RCD, Audubon California's Landowner Stewardship Program, and Environmental Science Associates.

For more information on Grasslands Park, contact Brett Williams at 530.666.8038 or for the Yolo County WMA contact Jenny Drewitz at 530.662.2037 x114. ☞

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 530.662.2037 x114 for more information on specifications and rates for rental or hire.



Audubon California Landowner Stewardship Program & The Center for Land-Based Learning

Center for Land-Based Learning Update

As one season winds down, another gears up here at the Center for Land-Based Learning! Both our FARMS and SLEWS youth development programs are celebrating another successful year—our ninth—educating and engaging youth regionally and statewide in sustainable agriculture and environmental restoration. Our summer intern program begins in June and brings SLEWS youth out to the Farm and Nature Center to learn more about the connection between healthy native ecosystems and successful farming. We'll also have several college interns from local universities learning about sustainable agriculture hands-on and helping to develop educational programming for the Fall.

The Farm and Nature Center, a project of the Center for Land-Based Learning and Audubon California's Landowner Stewardship Program, is in full swing. Our demonstration gardens are growing and we're making

other physical improvements such as a greenhouse and gathering areas for education and events. We've also hosted several workshops with partners over the last couple of months, including a Community Alliance with Family Farmers-sponsored Pest Predator workshop, a Native Pollinators workshop in partnership with the Xerces Society and a National Organic Standards training with NCAT and NRCS. We've also had another celebration of the life of Cesar Chavez, with 130 youth from Sacramento joining us to plant and learn about agriculture and farmworker issues. And we hosted the Yolo RCD's Annual Dinner on May 6th!

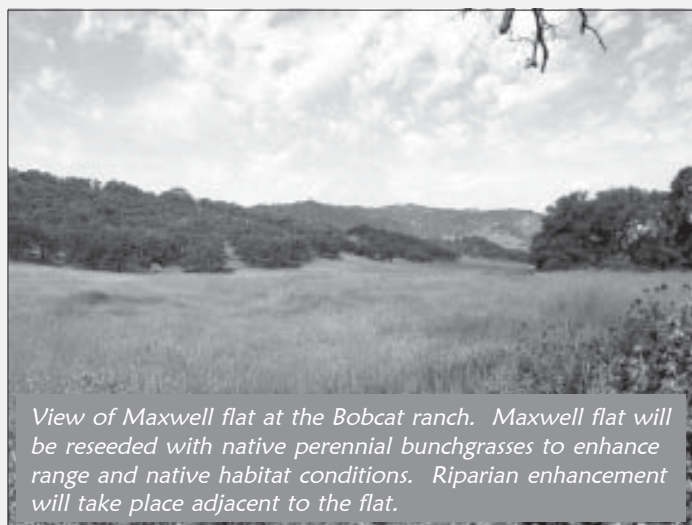
All of our workshops are geared toward bringing a diverse audience out to the Farm and Nature Center, with opportunities for youth, the public, landowners, and educators. A 2004-2005 program calendar is due out this summer. ☞

Audubon California Landowner Stewardship Program Update - Introducing the "Bobcat to Blue Oak" Riparian Restoration Project

On May 13 the Wildlife Conservation Board approved a grant to the Landowner Stewardship Program on the Blue Oak and Bobcat ranches northwest of Winters. The WCB funds are complemented by the NRCS Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program and grant funding from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

The Bobcat to Blue Oak restoration will be implemented over the course of three years in partnership with the Bobcat and Blue Oak Landowners, Center for Land-Based Learning, NRCS, and Yolo County RCD. This exciting partnership of landowners, non-profits, and governmental agencies has been critical to implementing high quality restoration projects in the region.

Excavation of several wildlife ponds began in May of 2004 after a second season of prescribed burns. A wildlife pond will be constructed with the goal of attracting tricolored blackbirds that are known to nest in the area. Habitat restoration will primarily



View of Maxwell flat at the Bobcat ranch. Maxwell flat will be reseeded with native perennial bunchgrasses to enhance range and native habitat conditions. Riparian enhancement will take place adjacent to the flat.

be aimed at implementing riparian, native perennial grassland, and wetland restoration. Plantings for this work will begin in the fall of 2004. All restoration activities will be implemented in a manner compatible with existing agricultural operations at both ranches.

For more information on the project contact Vance Russell, Audubon California, 530.795.2921. ☞

RCD Annual Dinner Celebrates 50 Years of Conservation Partnership Work in Yolo County

Over 100 guests joined us for this year's Annual Dinner to mark just over half a century of RCD/USDA NRCS Conservation partnership work in Yolo County. Eight former directors whose terms spanned nearly 40 years of that history attended the dinner and were recognized with a resolution presented by Yolo County District 5 Supervisor Lynnel Pollock.

A silent auction raised funds to send two students to the Annual Range and Natural Resources Camp in Half Moon Bay. The Sierra Orchards' Farm and Nature Center hosted the outdoor event, and Craig McNamara gave "pallet wagon" tours of the property and the Center's ongoing conservation projects.

It was a beautiful evening with great weather, fabulous scenery, delicious food, lively music, and good company! ☘



Executive Director Paul Robins with former directors (l-r) Fritz Durst, John Anderson, Joe Corcoran, Frank Sieferman, Sr., Melvin Durst, Don Rominger, Bob Moeller, and Joe Farnham.



Paul Robins introduces Range Camp scholarship recipients Jenell Jensen and Laura Martinez.



Tom Wehri, President of the CA Chapter of SWCS, presents award to RCD President Tom Muller.

CA Chapter of the Soil & Water Conservation Society Recognizes the Yolo County RCD/ NRCS Partnership with Three Awards:

- **Yolo RCD** for "Development and Implementation of a Water Quality Monitoring and Management Program in the Lower Union School Slough Watershed"
- **Paul Robins** for "Exceptional Leadership in Natural Resource Management and Programs to the Yolo RCD"
- **Stephen Jaouen** for "Outstanding Innovative Range Management Techniques in Northern California"

Yolo County RCD Publications

The Yolo County RCD offers various resource material 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 x119; or send an e-mail to mccloud@yolorcd.org. Please add tax and shipping & handling costs to the publication prices below:

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|---|---------|
| 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 |
| Working Habitat for Working Farms (video) | \$10 |
| Yolo County Soil Survey (CD-ROM) | \$13.92 |
| Capay Valley Conservation & Restoration Manual | \$15 |
| (free to Capay Valley residents) | |

Please add 7.75% sales tax to above prices

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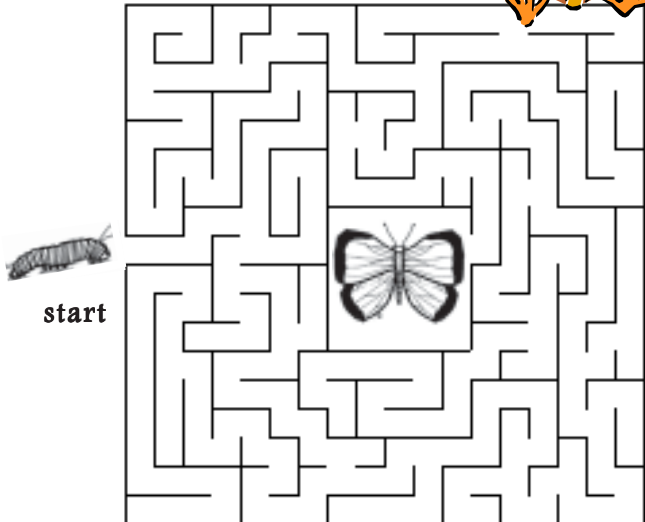
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Kid's Corner

Help the caterpillar
turn into a butterfly!



For environmental education links, go to:
<http://nacdnet.org/resources/Links-Education.htm>

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

If you would like to receive this newsletter electronically instead of by mail, please notify Susan McCloud at mccloud@yolorcd.org.

Yolo County RCD/NRCS Field Office
221 W. Court Street, Suite 1
Woodland, CA 95695



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