

Sustainable Conservation partners with agriculture, business and government leaders to find practical ways that the private sector can protect clean air, clean water and healthy ecosystems.

Restoration on Private Lands

We help landowners be good stewards of the environment by facilitating restoration projects and species protection.

Sustainable Agriculture

We promote the adoption of innovative farming practices so that farmers can protect the environment, boost their bottom lines and keep their land.

Sustainable Business

We stop pollution at the source by working proactively with business and regulatory agencies to solve problems through cooperation, rather than litigation.

THE Bridge

LETTER FROM THE **Executive Director**

Dear Friends,

In Sustainable Conservation's work to make sound environmental stewardship "business as usual," we don't get the chance to thank our partners enough for their tremendous contributions. One vital group in particular gets praised the least – landowners.

Because more than half of all land in the U.S. (close to 1.3 billion acres) is privately owned, how these folks manage their properties has a dramatic and lasting effect on the environment. They are the front-line defenders in protecting the quality of our air and water, and ecosystems that benefit people and wildlife alike. The fate of imperiled and endangered species, 90% of which make their homes on private land, largely rests in these individuals' hands.

That's why when the Sand County Foundation, a Wisconsin-based non-profit that works with landowners to improve wildlife habitat nationally, asked Sustainable Conservation and the California Farm Bureau Federation to co-sponsor the first-ever Leopold Conservation Award in California, we jumped at the opportunity. Advancing sustainable land stewardship is something we've been doing for almost 15 years.

Dedicated to the spirit of world-renowned conservationist Aldo Leopold (author of *A Sand County Almanac*), the Leopold Conservation Award celebrates the extraordinary efforts of farmers and ranchers to conserve and protect the natural resources they preside over. Having become a resounding success in seven states, the award also aims to inspire other would-be conservationists and promote a better understanding among the public about the important role landowners play in sustaining a healthy planet.

As you'll read inside, the efforts of the three finalists vying for the \$10,000 California grand prize are tremendous. Despite challenges such as increased regulation, razor-thin profit margins and economic incentives to sell their land, they're proving that a thriving business and environment can go hand in hand.

Brad and Randy Lange of Lange Twins Wine Estates near Lodi employ natural predators to help manage pests, minimizing the use of costly chemical pesticides. The Rickert family of Prather Ranch implemented a unique method for managing their rice fields that benefits a bevy of waterfowl living in the shadow of Mt. Shasta. By planting native vegetation, Jack Varian of Monterey County's V6 Ranch discovered an inexpensive way to combat soil erosion and create habitat for a diverse assortment of wildlife. The list goes on and on.

While we wish this year's Leopold Conservation Award finalists the best of luck, they and countless other landowners working to create a healthy environment are already winners to us.



Sound environmental stewardship on private land is vital to keeping our air and water clean, and ecosystems healthy.



Ashley Boren, Executive Director

Leopold Conservation Award

Honoring Outstanding Environmental Stewardship

In partnership with the Sand County Foundation and California Farm Bureau Federation, Sustainable Conservation is helping launch the Leopold Conservation Award in California.

The award recognizes private landowners' commitment to exceptional environmental stewardship and management of their land. The award also aims to inspire others to become effective environmental stewards, and help the public understand the important role dedicated farmers and ranchers play in sustaining a healthy environment. Rewarding and exemplifying landowners' commitment to protecting natural resources is crucial – as a majority of the nation's remaining wild places and species are located on or near private property.

The Leopold Conservation Award was born out of the Sand County Foundation's belief that voluntary conservation by private landowners, rather than government regulation, benefits the environment more – and at a lower cost and with more lasting results. The foundation also recognized that ranchers, farmers and foresters are on the front lines of conservation and should be recognized for their part in protecting the environment.

The first Leopold Conservation Award was presented in Colorado in 2003 with the help of the Colorado Cattlemen's Association and Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust. Because of the award's popularity, the foundation expanded it to six other states.

The grand prize of \$10,000 and a crystal rendering of Aldo Leopold, author of *A Sand County Almanac*, will be presented at the California Farm Bureau Federation's annual convention in December. Two \$1,000 runner-up prizes will also be given.

The grand prize winner and runners-up will be picked from three categories: Nurseries and Crops; Dairy, Beef and Poultry; and Rangeland and Timber. Selection is based in part on the applicants' commitment to sustainable land management, the overall health of their land, implementation of innovative practices and dedication to community outreach and leadership.

About Our Leopold Conservation Award Partners



The Sand County Foundation is a private, non-profit conservation group dedicated to working with private landowners to improve habitat on their land. The Sand

County Foundation's mission is to advance the use of ethical and scientifically sound land management practices and partnerships for the benefit of people and their rural landscapes.

The Sand County Foundation works with private landowners because the majority of the nation's fish, wildlife and natural resources are found on private lands. They back local champions, invest in civil society and place incentives before regulation to create solutions that endure and grow.

The foundation considers its work – encouraging the exercise of private responsibility in the pursuit of improved land health – an essential alternative to the commonly used strategies in modern conservation.



The California Farm Bureau Federation (Farm Bureau) is

California's largest farm organization, comprised of 53 county farm bureaus representing over 88,000 members throughout California, including farm

families and those who support the farming way of life. It is a non-governmental, non-profit, voluntary membership organization whose purpose is to represent, protect and promote agricultural interests throughout the State of California and to find solutions to the problems of the farm, farm home and rural community. The Farm Bureau strives to protect and improve the ability of farmers and ranchers engaged in production agriculture to provide a safe and reliable supply of food, fiber and flowers through responsible stewardship of their resources.



“Why is it that conservation is so rarely practiced by those who must extract a living from the land?”

– Aldo Leopold

Keepers of the Land

Profiles of the 2006 California Leopold Conservation Award Finalists

Brad and Randy Lange, Lange Twins Wine Estates

NURSERIES AND CROPS

For Brad and his brother Randy, owners of the Lange Twins Wine Estates near Lodi, choosing between preservation and profits is easy. Their pick? Both.

Started by their father in the '40s, the brothers farm close to 6,500 acres of stunning vineyards along the winding Mokelumne River. More than a decade ago, the brothers realized that the old way of doing business – sacrificing a thriving environment for a thriving business – was just that, old. They have proven being good stewards of the environment can be good for the bottom line.

To minimize the use of harmful and costly pesticides, the Lange brothers pioneered new ways to combat pests with natural predators. Now, dozens of owl, bat and bird houses adorn trees and

structures throughout the property, attracting a range of rodent- and insect-eating animals. French plum trees growing between the seemingly endless rows of grapevines host the Anagrus epos wasp, whose hatchlings feed on the eggs of the infamous leafhopper. The small but voracious leafhopper causes millions of dollars in damage each year to grapes across the state.

Brad and Randy planted cover crops between the rows of grapes to reduce dust, improve soil quality, keep rain from washing precious topsoil into the river and provide additional habitat for beneficial species. Three solar arrays producing up to 60 kilowatts of electricity provide cheap, clean energy to power vineyard operations, including

irrigation pumps and their farmhouse.

They use specialized sprayers that reduce fungicide use by up to 50% and cut the amount of water required per application ten-fold. Less spraying also means fewer tractor passes through the vineyard, saving on fuel and labor and lowering emissions of dust and other airborne pollutants.

"The environmental stewardship frame of mind allows us to think outside the box to find creative solutions that can be mutually beneficial to our ecosystem *and* to our bottom line...not to mention the priceless benefit of conserving the environment for future farming generations," Brad said.

The Lange brothers' most recent endeavor was the completion of a state-of-the-art winery facility that incorporates energy-efficient lighting, safe sanitation methods that employ ozone instead of chlorine and an advanced processing system to treat wastewater generated during the wine-making process. The long-term plans for the wastewater processing system include creating marshlands as safe habitat for local and migratory birds.

For the brothers, success never *tasted* so sweet.



Brad (left) and Randy Lange of the Lange Twins Wine Estates have cultivated a thriving wine-making business focused on resource preservation.

The Rickert Family, Prather Ranch

DAIRY, BEEF AND POULTRY

Rural development and habitat loss over the last 25 years have pushed many species of wildlife in California to the brink. Hundreds of plants and animals are now threatened, endangered or simply gone. During the last quarter-century, though, one dedicated ranching family has worked hard to buck the trend.

Enter the Rickerts – Jim, Mary and their son James. They are partial owners and managers of Prather Ranch – a 34,000-acre patchwork of cattle ranches and agricultural land stretching across Northern California. Since 1979, when Jim and Mary were hired to oversee Prather Ranch, the Rickert's approach to running this multi-million-dollar business hasn't changed: don't overlook the little things, like birds and bugs.

One of their first efforts to promote biodiversity was taking an unusual approach to managing the rice fields on their Fall River Valley ranches

near Mt. Shasta. After harvesting the rice, they began tilling the stubble into the soil and keeping the fields covered in water year-round. The practice not only benefited common species of waterfowl such as Canadian and snow geese, but attracted shore birds like plovers and terns which had previously called only the Pacific coastline home.

"It required more time and money, but we felt we were doing the right thing – providing valuable habitat during waterfowl migration," Mary said. "It's absolutely amazing to see literally thousands of birds on the fields during the winter months feeding on the stubble and then migrating to their next destination."

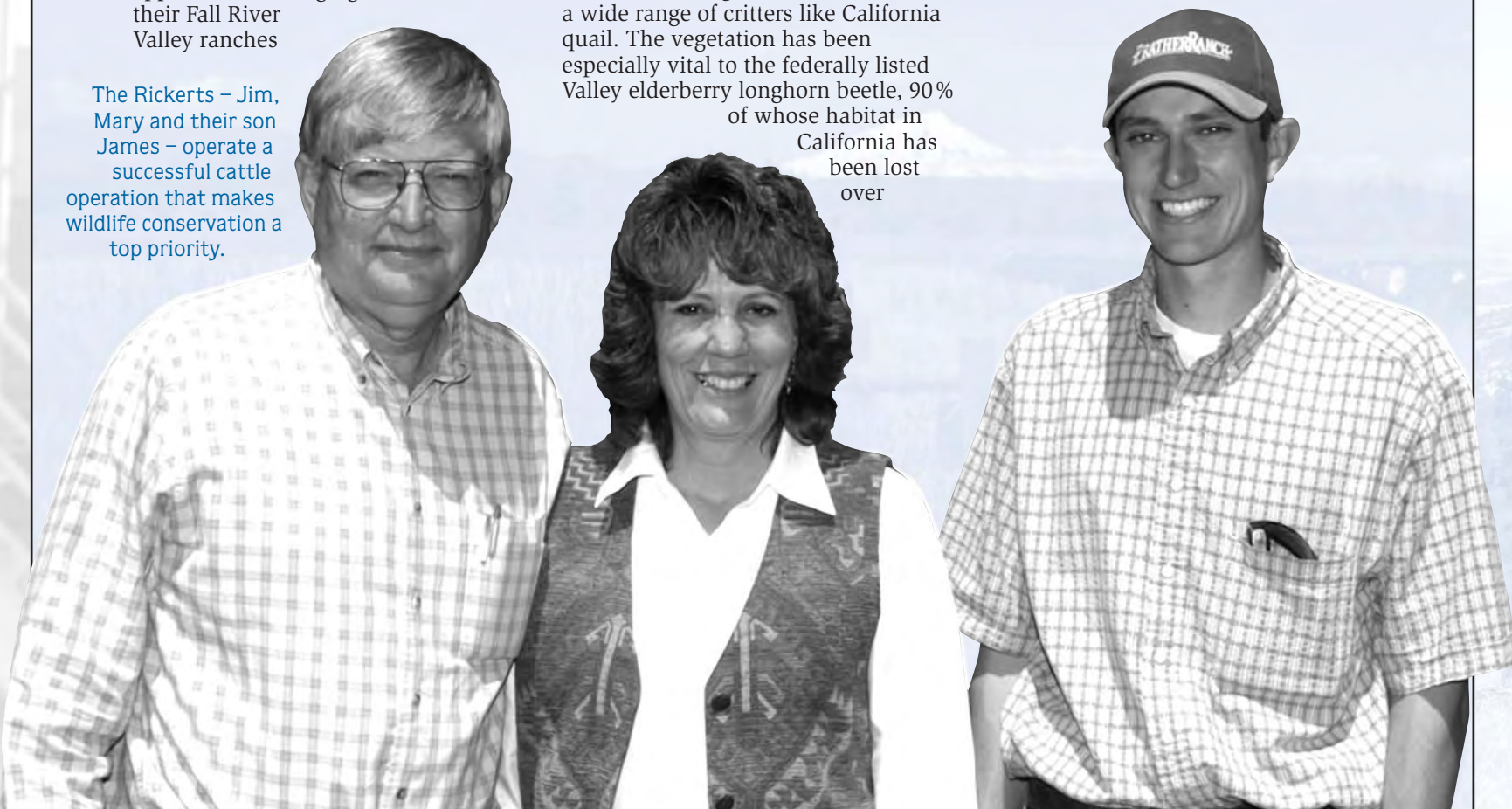
But, they were just getting warmed up.

Across their 10 other ranches, the Rickerts planted more than eight miles of riparian habitat along countless streams and irrigation canals to benefit a wide range of critters like California quail. The vegetation has been especially vital to the federally listed Valley elderberry longhorn beetle, 90% of whose habitat in California has been lost over

the last 150 years due in part to livestock grazing. Endangered Shasta crayfish and melodic willow flycatchers have also benefited.

In 2002, the Rickerts signed one of the state's first conservation agreements to safeguard vernal pools and riparian zones throughout their 2,240-acre Fenwood Ranch near Redding. Other easements include more than 12,000 acres in Colusa County to preserve some of the state's most spectacular wildflowers. An almost 1,500-acre easement covers property along one of the country's most prized trout streams.

The Rickert's above-and-beyond commitment to the little things hasn't gone unnoticed. In addition to a myriad of other accolades, they've received Governor Schwarzenegger's Environment and Economic Leadership Award, California's top environmental honor.



The Rickerts – Jim, Mary and their son James – operate a successful cattle operation that makes wildlife conservation a top priority.

"When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect."

– Aldo Leopold

Jack Varian, V6 Ranch

RANGELAND AND TIMBER

"The land is a like a person ... like you and me," Jack Varian said during a recent visit with him at his 17,000-acre ranch nestled among the rolling hills of southern Monterey County. "It likes to be cared for. And, if you do it right, it'll take care of you."

Varian's approach to running the V6 Ranch and raising cattle, which he and his family have been doing for nearly a half-century, isn't just about profits. It's also about being good caretakers of the land, preserving the landscape and enhancing biodiversity.

And, he takes his business very seriously.

To prevent erosion of the Little Cholame Creek that meanders through his property, improve its water quality and boost the diversity of the plant and animal life it supports, Varian planted hundreds of willow and cottonwood trees along the stream's banks.

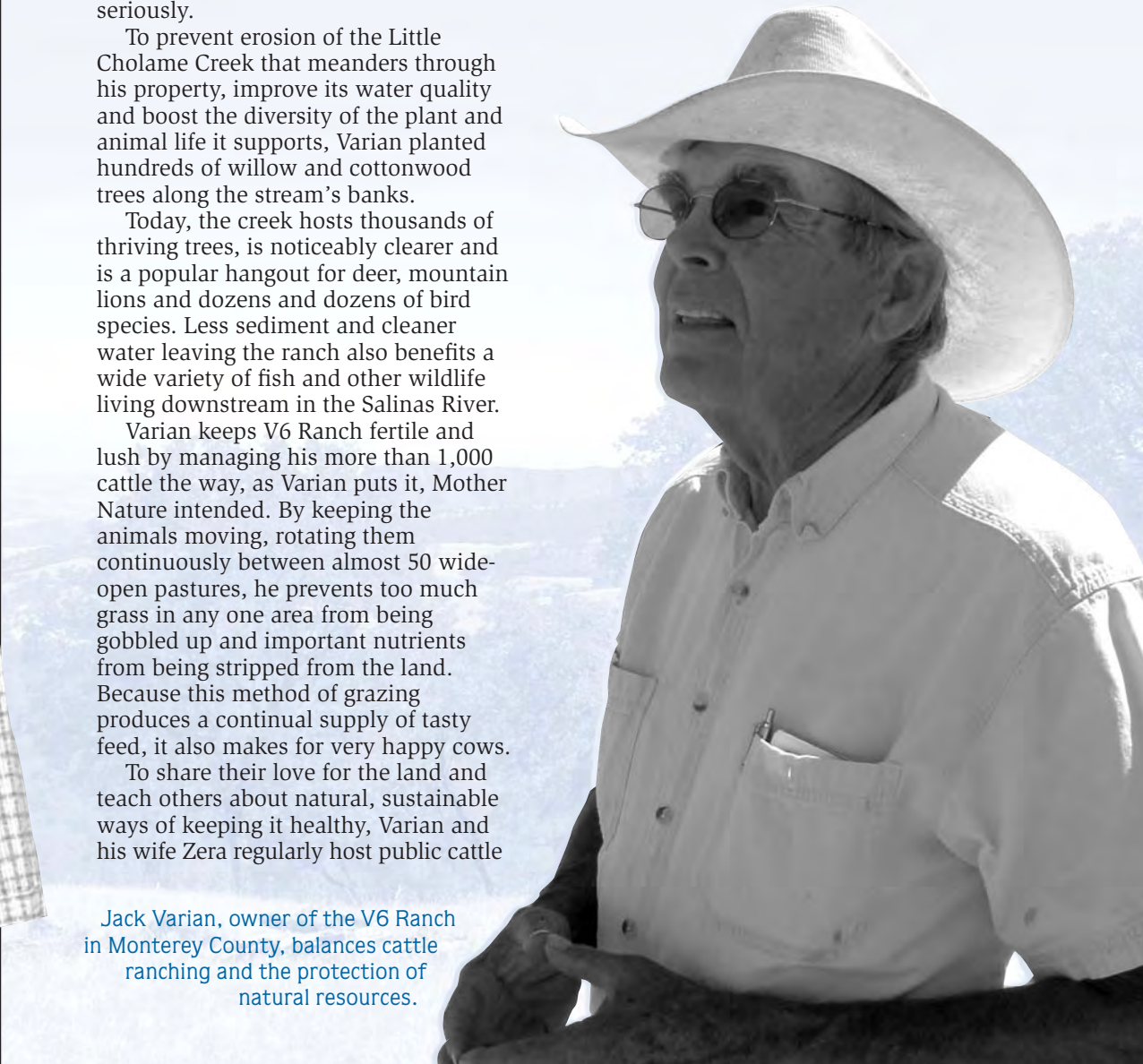
Today, the creek hosts thousands of thriving trees, is noticeably clearer and is a popular hangout for deer, mountain lions and dozens and dozens of bird species. Less sediment and cleaner water leaving the ranch also benefits a wide variety of fish and other wildlife living downstream in the Salinas River.

Varian keeps V6 Ranch fertile and lush by managing his more than 1,000 cattle the way, as Varian puts it, Mother Nature intended. By keeping the animals moving, rotating them continuously between almost 50 wide-open pastures, he prevents too much grass in any one area from being gobbled up and important nutrients from being stripped from the land. Because this method of grazing produces a continual supply of tasty feed, it also makes for very happy cows.

To share their love for the land and teach others about natural, sustainable ways of keeping it healthy, Varian and his wife Zera regularly host public cattle

drives, roundups and ecological tours.

While these and many other efforts have made the V6 Ranch a model for balanced environmental and economic stewardship, Varian felt he owed his land more. So, in 2001 he established a conservation easement that protects every grass- and tree-covered hill and valley on the ranch. The easement will prevent future sub-division and development, and ensure the land that has taken care of Varian and three generations of his family will always get the care it deserves.



Jack Varian, owner of the V6 Ranch in Monterey County, balances cattle ranching and the protection of natural resources.



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If you prefer to receive our newsletter by e-mail, please send a message to suscon@suscon.org with "Newsletter" in the subject line. You will receive subsequent issues as an e-mail attachment. You can also download our newsletter from our website at www.suscon.org.



Milestones

New Modesto Office Boosts Support for Environment, Agriculture

Last May, Sustainable Conservation celebrated the opening of its new Modesto office. Over 50 agricultural, business and regulatory leaders joined staff at our open house to mark the momentous occasion. Attendees learned first hand about our work with California farmers and dairy producers to promote practices that are environmentally and economically sound. We believe our day-to-day presence in the Central Valley will enable us to grow new partnerships – and evolve existing ones – with farmers, agricultural leaders and policymakers in the region. Find out more on our website (www.suscon.org).



A spectrum of biodiesel samples, renewable fuel made from food crops, was on display at Sustainable Conservation's Modesto open house in May.

Endangered Beetle Protected Under Momentous Agreement

The summer of 2006 was a big one for a unique little beetle – and Sustainable Conservation. Under our first Safe Harbor Agreement approved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, endangered Valley elderberry longhorn beetles in Glenn County are getting a new lease on life. The agreement will provide our Chico-based non-profit collaborator, River Partners, legal protection against endangered species laws if any beetles are accidentally killed while restoring nearly 260 acres of vital habitat along the Sacramento River. Sustainable Conservation is pursuing approval for an additional Safe Harbor Agreement that will benefit the endangered California red-legged frog in Shasta and Tehama counties. We'll keep you posted on our progress.

Santa Cruz Permit Coordination Program Takes Off

Following three years of groundwork with federal, state and local regulatory agencies, Sustainable Conservation's Partners in Restoration (PIR) program is up and running across nearly 285,000 acres in Santa Cruz County. The program simplifies the complex regulatory process that landowners face when restoring ecosystems on their properties, allowing participants to gain quick, low-cost approval for projects to protect natural resources. Efforts to remove damaging invasive plants, improve fish habitat and prevent streambank erosion are underway. Now in its eighth year, our statewide PIR program extends from Humboldt to San Diego and has been established, or is in development, in 18 counties.

We've
Moved!

Sustainable Conservation is excited to announce we've moved our headquarters to a larger San Francisco location:

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