

# Stewardship Leaders in Agriculture

## Combining Stewardship Practices

### BURROUGHS FAMILY FARMS- MERCED COUNTY, CA

Ward and Rosie Burroughs, in partnerships with their children, have several farms just outside Denair in the California Central Valley. Their farms have been in the same family for generations that have seen the development of new farms and farming enterprises. The Burroughs' own and operate California Cloverleaf Farms, Vista Almonds, B and B Pastures and Full Circle Dairy, and together are producing all organic cheese, milk, almonds, free-range eggs, and their most recent venture is olives. With the next generation always in mind, environmental stewardship has been a high priority of the Burroughs family. Whether it is their rotational grazing system, organic production methods, or other various sustainable farming practices, the family is a great example of a successful farming operation practicing environmental stewardship.

### MOTIVATION

The current Burroughs family members were motivated to stay in the business and continue the great work that the family started over 100 years ago. With new looming challenges, like an unpredictable climate, Ward and Rosie Burroughs have spent a significant amount of time studying best ranching practices and various grazing systems that will be the most sustainable. As Ward says, "Working ground annually doesn't fix much carbon because you lose it when you till, but the grass farming business, that's the key."

*"Healthy plants produce healthy animals.*

*Healthy animals produce healthy food."*



Photo credit: Burroughs Family Farms

### ACHIEVEMENTS

2012 Leopold Finalists

Water storage has created habitats for migrating birds

Owl boxes have been installed for pest management

Partnered with biologist to catalogue native plants on property



"My husband and I always had a strong responsibility for taking care of the land and passing it down to the next generation in better condition than we inherited it." - Rosie Burroughs



Photo credit: Burroughs Family Farms

*"In this part of the country, we're one of a few operations doing things like this. But those of us that are, are slowly*

**Project Partners**

California Climate and Agriculture Network, Organic Valley, Chico State University, UC Cooperative Extension



## ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP: BURROUGHS FAMILY FARMS

### BEGINNINGS AND BARRIERS

The Burroughs family farm began their transition into organic production a decade ago, and this year all their operations will be certified organic. Along with other improvements, this has required an initial financial investment. However, according to the Burroughs, they have found that these changes have meant less risk over time, considering the unstable market and climate, and grazing practices help the operation by reducing costs of feed. The dairies are members of the Organic Valley cooperative, which provides additional security.

### PROJECT DETAILS

#### IMPLEMENTATION AND MANAGEMENT

The Burroughs' cattle graze, getting 80 percent of their nutrition from forage. They use a Managed Intensive Grazing (MIG) method, which rotates the cattle between small, irrigated pastures for short periods, allowing for good nutrition, and a recovery period for the grasses. Grazing cattle also deposit manure on the fields, improving soil nutrients and structure, and feeding microorganisms. Additionally, this practice greatly reduces greenhouse gas emissions, like methane, which is a potent GHG that has twenty times the climate change impact of carbon dioxide. The fields use no synthetic pesticides, fertilizers or herbicides. The Burroughs family use compost on their fields to increase soil nutrients and organic matter. The compost is created from imported manure from neighboring farms and garlic and onion peelings from a local processing facility, which the family mixes with almond orchard green waste and paper products. Their pastures have French drains, which are gravel-filled ditches that criss-cross their property, to eliminate run off and channel excess water into holding ponds. The French drains eliminate pooling on their fields, which improve pasture health. The holding ponds also act as a habitat for birds, the variety of which seems to grow with every year. Birds on their farm, attracted to the owl boxes they have installed, provide pest management by catching gophers. The family has installed solar panels that provide 80 percent of the irrigation pumping energy for their almonds, and two of the dairies have started installing solar panels for irrigation pump energy. Their water monitoring system and a weather monitoring system, has increased their irrigation efficiency, reducing water and cost.

#### FOSTERING SUCCESS

Committed to always increasing the sustainability of their operation, and recognizing that there is always more to learn, Rosie and Ward regularly attend conferences and workshops. They have also been working with a biologist to catalogue the different types of native grasses and plants growing on their property. Through this, they have found that their grazing practices have been beneficial to the native plant species. The family feels fortunate for having a successful operation, and wants to share their experiences with the community. They have had the opportunity to present at the EcoFarm Conference and MOSES Organic Farming Conference. They regularly host farm tours, including international students from as far as Japan, Brazil, and New Zealand, and even started a support group for ranchers with grazing operations.

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