

Stewardship Leaders in Agriculture

Holistic Management

T.O. CATTLE COMPANY & MORRIS GRASSFED BEEF

Joe and Julie Morris have owned and operated T.O. Cattle Company and Morris Grassfed Beef since 1991 when Joe took over his grandfather's 200-acre ranch near San Juan Bautista, California. The Morris' have since grown to lease an additional 5,000 private and public acres while managing 1,000 stocker cattle and 270 cows to supply their grassfed beef business. Joe's family includes five generations of ranchers and his ranching practices have been influenced by the Vaquero tradition where the health of the land, the animals, and the people are considered to be equal and interdependent. This philosophy is also the essence of holistic management where ranchers offer high quality beef while supporting living soils, a biologically rich landscape, and clean water.

GRASSFED BEEF AND SUSTAINABILITY

Holistic management is a systems thinking decision-making model that takes into account the environmental, economic, and social implications of management decisions. At Morris Grassfed Beef holistic planning ensures land management practices produce the healthy rangelands necessary for long term sustainability. The impacts of the cattle fertilize the soil while their grazing encourages the production of deep-rooted native, perennial grasses that capture water, store sunlight and carbon, and prevent soil erosion. Using holistic management, the Morris' seek to address the causes of climate change by building the soil and increasing soil organic matter. Their soils act as a "carbon sink," removing excess carbon dioxide from the atmosphere to help mitigate climate change and holding water longer.



ACHIEVEMENTS

- American Grassfed Association Certified
- Joe and Julie Morris are farm advisors with California Climate and Agriculture Network
- 2012 Quivira's Clarence Burch Award
- Central Coast Rangeland Coalition Co-founder



Photos Courtesy of Joe Morris and California Cattlemen's Association

"In the process of raising our grass-fed beef, we're using the animals to create rangeland that sequesters carbon, holds more water, and generates biodiversity, that's the essence of sustainability." -Joe Morris



"Pasture management practices that improve the nutritional quality of forage crops could reduce methane emissions from pasture beef by about 15 to 30%." -2011 Report by the Union of Concerned Scientists

PROJECT PARTNERS

California Climate and Agriculture Network (CalCAN), Soil Carbon Coalition, Quivira Coalition

T.O. Cattle Company and Strategic Grazing

BEGINNINGS

By strategically utilizing cattle to help manage the land for carbon sequestration, water infiltration, and wildlife diversity, T.O. Cattle Company demonstrates the ways in which strategic grazing can serve as a means for improving the environment. Over the years The Morris' have negotiated several arrangements with public agencies to earn reduced lease rates in exchange for implementing strategic grazing efforts that have provided an alternative to burning while contributing to valuable ecosystems services and resource conservation. For the Morris' holistic management has been a continual learning process of refining their grazing strategy and applying innovative techniques in order to provide multiple environmental benefits.

PROJECT DETAILS

An ongoing dedication to Holistic Management and land stewardship led the Quivira Coalition to select Joe Morris as the recipient of the 2012 Clarence Butch Award. Joe is currently working on two interrelated projects that focus on more effectively using his cattle and expanding his educational impact. To maximize the benefits of the animals in the system he wants to increase the stock density of his herd and develop an internship program that will simultaneously supply labor and train others that are interested in learning Holistic Management practices. In addition, Joe plans on expanding his collaboration with The Soil Carbon Coalition to add more soil carbon monitoring transects on his land to document performance.

IMPLEMENTATION AND MANAGEMENT

Joe's grazing strategy currently involves managing for denser herds of cattle and longer recovery periods for grazed plants to mirror the grazing patterns that native herds of herbivores co-evolved with and which promote the health of California's native grassland ecosystem. Intensively and adaptively managing grazing patterns increases the organic matter in their soils and allows for profitable rangeland utilization while increasing local food production, grassland species diversity and forage productivity. An additional benefit of the increased organic matter content of the soil is improved water penetration, retention and availability to plants which is an especially important benefit for arid regions of California like San Benito County.

FOSTERING SUCCESS

T.O. Cattle Company and Morris Grassfed Beef is a family owned operation whose success has given the Morris' a reputation as leading consultants in the ranching industry. As a renowned educator Joe extends the spirit of community and generosity by openly sharing his knowledge of Holistic Management with other ranchers. The Morris' have hosted countless rancher field days, community educational events, and have recently launched Rancher-to-Rancher, a program intended to create trial sites on ranches so that California ranchers can learn from their work on their land as rapidly as our changing world requires.

For more information please contact: