

Stewardship Leaders in Agriculture

Combining Stewardship Practices

V6 RANCH- PARKFIELD, CA

Jack and Zera Varian and their family own and operate V6 Ranch in Parkfield, California. With more than 17,000 acres of grazing land, the family sustainably raises grass-fed beef, as well as hosting tours and cattle drives. After nearly fifty years of operation, V6 Ranch has become much more than a cattle ranch. Jack and Zera and their family have come to care very deeply for the land and community. Now, V6 Ranch operates with conservation and sustainability as a high priority.

MOTIVATION

As a lifelong rancher, Jack thought he knew everything about the land he raised his cattle on. But while facing a five-year drought, he knew he had to reconsider his operation if he wanted it to continue. Through Holistic Management, a system that teaches systems thinking and long-term goals to improve the environment and quality of life, Jack created a new system for his business. Now, they operate with a sustainable grazing system, plant trees, and have a conservation easement on their property.

"Jack is a great example of how ranchers can be great stewards of our land...Jack is an inspiration for ranchers and conservationists alike."



Jack and Zee Varian
Photo credit: V6 Ranch

ACHIEVEMENTS

2006 & 2007 Leopold Conservation Award Finalist

Increased water quality of creek by planting native species

Created a conservation easement for entire 17,000-acre property



Photo credit: V6 Ranch

"I think probably the most beautiful picture ever painted is the one Mother Nature painted." - Jack Varian



Photo credit: V6 Ranch

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP: V6 RANCH

BEGINNINGS AND BARRIERS

Many of the projects implemented on the V6 Ranch have required time, funding, and planning. The family's dedication to improving their operation encouraged them to partner with other organizations and the local community, and they have been able to secure financial assistance and support from both nonprofit and governmental organizations, and many volunteers to help with the operations.

PROJECT DETAILS

IMPLEMENTATION AND MANAGEMENT

Jack Varian and his family manage their one thousand cattle, according to Jack, "how Mother Nature intended," which has led to both healthier cattle and landscape. The property has been segmented into small grazing plots, instead of allowing the cows to graze on the entire property at once. In this this grazing system, cattle forage on the nutritious grasses for short, managed periods, allowing the grass to regrow. The cattle, in turn, provide natural fertilizer for the grass and improve soil quality. According to the California Rangeland Conservation Coalition, nearly all species of birds and native plants of the grasslands, and vernal pool species, will benefit from these managed and responsible grazing systems. The Varian family has not only worked hard to maintain the landscape, but to enhance it. They planted hundreds of cottonwood and willow trees along the Little Cholame Creek that crosses their property. These trees have helped to prevent erosion, improve water quality, and increase the biodiversity of flora and fauna. The creek is clearer, and the increased vegetation has attracted all sorts of wildlife, including deer, mountain lions and dozens of bird species. As the Little Cholame Creek runs into the Salinas River, the Varian's actions have also improved the lives of fish and birds downstream. In 2001, with the help of California Rangeland Trust and other organizations, the Varians established a conservation easement on all 17,000 acres of their property, which will restrict development on the land in the future. In 2008, the Varian family, along with many volunteers, planted 1000 valley oak trees along Parkfield Coalinga Road, increasing shade and bird habitats.

FOSTERING SUCCESS

Aside from environmental stewardship, the Varian family also values working with the community. They regularly host public cattle drives, round ups and ecological tours, helping to educate the public about California's ranching history. The sustainable practices of V6 Ranch are a great example for ranching operations throughout California, showing that environmentally beneficial practices can also be beneficial for business. They have been recognized for their great work, and in 2006 and 2007 were Leopold Conservation Award finalists.

"The land is like a person...like you and me. It likes to be cared for. And, if you do it right, it'll take care of you.

Project Partners

California Rangeland Trust,
California Wildlife Conservation Board,
California Department of Fish and Game,
California Department of Transportation,
David and Lucile Packard Foundation

For more information please contact: