

Stewardship Leaders in Agriculture

Combining Stewardship Practices

WORK RANCH

George and Elaine Work and their son Ben and his wife Kelly, own and operate Work Ranch in San Miguel, in southern Monterey County. Work Ranch is a 12,000-acre ranch, divided into fifty pastures so both the cattle and grass can be managed better. George described his family as ‘solar energy converters’- “we convert solar energy into usable products, like beef,” – which shows their holistic perspective of the operation. George, a third generation rancher, says, “As ranchers, we are miles ahead of where we were only a few years ago, because of the collaborative initiatives that are ongoing.”

MOTIVATION

As a life long learner, George has taken many workshops and trainings to learn more about how he can improve the ranching operation. One of the most inspiring was a five-day training in Holistic Management™, which teaches how to make decisions that are environmentally, socially, and financially sound. George says he is still using the principles he learned in the course on Work Ranch, and as the ranch is transitioning to his son, those lessons remain important.

“The most important ‘crop’ we produce is our relationships, not only with the land, but with others.”

George Work



George and Elaine Work
(photo credit: CA Cattlemen’s Association)

ACHIEVEMENTS

Helped develop wildlife ramp for troughs, and ground level trough to increase water access for ranch wildlife

George was active in getting the Farm Stay Program passed, which has allowed the Works to host overnight guests, to bridge the urban and farm gap

Photo credit: CA Cattlemen’s Association/CA Rangeland Conservation Coalition



“We all have a purpose-driven life. One of my purposes is to find and share good information.” –George Work



Photo credit:
CA Cattlemen's Association

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Project Partners

Bureau of Land Management
Ducks Unlimited
Natural Resources
Conservation Service
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service



ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP: WORK RANCH

BEGINNINGS AND BARRIERS

George's father implemented some of the first conservation practices on the ranch, which both taught and inspired George to continue running the ranch in a similar way. In the 1950's he worked with CA Department of Fish and Game to install secure quail guzzlers, which provide water for small birds and rodents from collected rainwater. These systems are believed to be some of the first conservation practices implemented on the ranch, and are still maintained by George's family. The Work family has continued to consider the environment in running their ranch. As new generations are involved in the ranch, new barriers also are experienced, like the extremely low rainfall in 2005 and continuing to work within newly developed regulations.

PROJECT DETAILS

IMPLEMENTATION & MANAGEMENT

The Works have implemented a number of ecologically beneficial practices on their ranch, starting when George's father was ranching the property. They have installed cross-fencing, which allows the cattle to be rotated between pastures to allow the forage crop to rest and regrow. The Work's have been inspired by a new ranching concept that trains cattle to eat nutritious weeds that they otherwise would not eat, and also to train the cattle to stay in a herd. These practices enhance and protect riparian areas without fences, allow for prescriptive grazing, reduces invasive species, controls fuel load, and can also be used for removing fire hazards through crushing brush and healing erosion cuts. George has also implemented water infrastructure development, through the wildlife-friendly trough ramps and ground-level troughs. They continue to monitor the ground level troughs and have seen that they are utilized by many different species, including lizards, mountain lions, raccoons, and deer. The Works also continue to host workshops and guided hunts for pigs, Tule Elk, and deer, on their ranch, which makes up about 30 percent of their annual ranch income, of which a portion goes back to improving wildlife habitat and the freedom explore other environmentally friendly practices.

FOSTERING SUCCESS

The innovations of Work Ranch have inspired neighbors to implement the same wildlife-friendly troughs. George has continued to stay active in the community and participates on the Central Coast Rangeland Coalition and the Roots of Change Stewardship Council. He is a founding member of Rancher Self-Assessment Project, which provides ranchers with a way to evaluate how sustainable their ranch management decisions are. George was also active in acquiring a U.S.D.A. mobile livestock processing plant to increase local ranchers ability to market local products. Work Ranch has future plans for a possible conservation easement, and they are proud to be transitioning into a fourth and fifth generation ranch.

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