



United States Department of Agriculture  
Natural Resources Conservation Service

CALIFORNIA  
RANGELAND  
*Trust*

helping people help the land



# LANDOWNER PROFILE

July 2007

## NRCS Programs Used:

- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
- Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)
- Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)
- Conservation Security Program (CSP)
- Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA)

## Conservation Practices Used:

- Prescribed grazing
- Prescribed burning
- Use exclusion/fencing
- Tree/shrub establishment
- Riparian forest buffer
- Conservation cover
- Pest management
- Upland wildlife habitat management
- Wildlife watering facility
- Streambank protection
- Ponds
- Livestock watering facilities
- Pipelines
- Spring development
- Buffer strip

In 1976 when Hank Stone co-owner of Yolo Land and Cattle was setting up irrigated pasture to feed his beef cows during the dry summer months, he didn't just contact the local irrigation district like most ranchers faced with the same need.

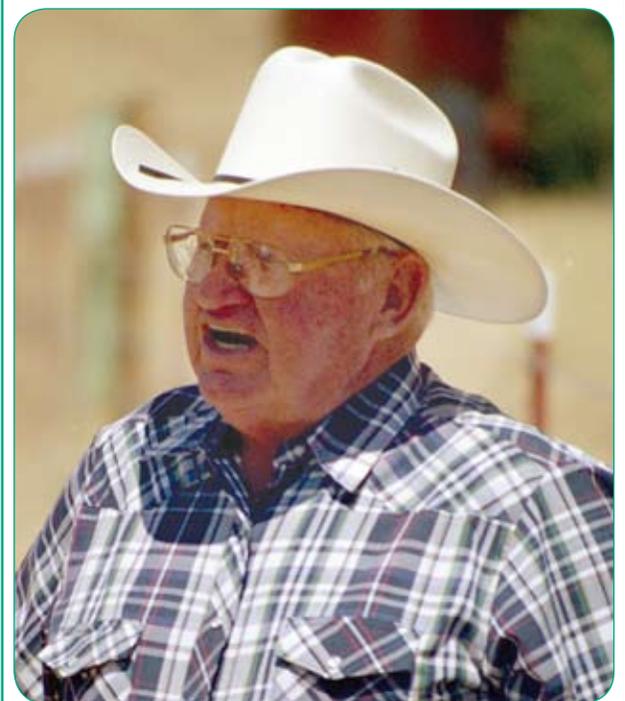
No, Hank crafted a deal with a local tomato cannery: He would use the rinse water discharged from their cannery, rotating it through fields of forage and row crops. The crops got the drink they needed and filtered the water helping it emerge

cleaner on the other side; both sides won. This inventive symbiosis was a harbinger of how Hank—now with sons Scott and Casey—was to look for sustainable win-win solutions on their ranch for years to come.

Part of that win-win strategy has come from working with USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service. "Many people who come to us for conservation help come seeking answers and fixes for one problem—erosion or invasive species, water issues or whatever it may be," says Phil Hogan, Yolo County District Conservationist for NRCS in California. "But the Stones have tackled and achieved improvements in each resource: soil, water, native plants, and wildlife habitat. They are big picture people."

In part that picture is big because the ranch itself—at 7,500 acres and strategically located against the Interior Coastal Range—is big enough to substantially affect two watersheds and the resources within them such as water quality and wildlife corridors. "Those benefits are much harder to achieve with smaller parcels of land," says Hogan.

The Stones, however, have enlarged these benefits beyond their own considerable holdings by involving neighbors, partners, and the public in their efforts. For example, Scott Stone, worked with Audubon California to convince 26 neighbors to take part in an effort with California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CALFIRE) to control brush encroachment



Landowner Hank Stone.

into the grasslands and improve habitat qualities of the land. It is the largest Vegetation Management Plan of its kind in the State.

It runs in the family. As far back as 1981 Hank Stone, as an Associate Director with the Yolo County Resource Conservation District, spearheaded efforts to coordinate vegetation management in both Napa and Yolo County on 160,000 acres of rangeland.

“Hank Stone and his family have been trailblazers in finding new ways to expand their ranching operation while paying close attention to conservation and protecting the environment,” commented Bruce Hafenfeld, California Cattlemen’s Association President. “They exemplify the best of California’s many progressive cattle producers.”

In other restoration work the Stones have worked with NRCS and Audubon California to gradually nudge the vegetation back toward a more native state using shrubs, trees, and perennial grasses.

The deep-rooted native perennial grasses improve infiltration and soil organic matter and typically stay green and provide forage longer into the dry summer season. The native shrubs and trees, primarily planted along ranch ponds and riparian areas provide cover and food for wildlife. Much of the actual planting has been done as cooperative education efforts by local high school students working through the Center for Land Based Learning.

With the help of many miles of fencing the Stones use prescribed grazing techniques, moving the animals throughout the ranch to mutually benefit livestock and vegetation. The animals are rotated through areas to keep down invasive species or out of areas to allow them

to “rest.” Livestock are also kept away from ponds and streams with wildlife friendly fencing and are pumped drinking water at solar-powered watering facilities.

In recent years NRCS conservationists used the Ranch for a training exercise for new employees who wrote a conservation plan for a portion of the ranch nearest the homestead. As part of the plan, ranch ponds were regraded and planted with native species—with the help of students and EQIP cost share funding. The restoration work provided a double economic return:

not only did it increase the carrying capacity of the ranch but it improved the aesthetic condition as well—opening up the possibility of hosting events such as tours and weddings to provide an additional income stream.

In all their restoration efforts, the Stones never forget that people are an integral part of the landscape. All guests at the ranch, including those on the numerous tours, are made to feel right at home. A full course meal (complete with meat fresh from the ranch, of course) is served by the Stones at the end of the day, making for an experience that no one soon forgets.

A quarter century of conservation, however, could be undone overnight if the ranch were to go the way of many others in the area—being subdivided into small acreage home lots or golf courses. Fortunately for the watershed and those who live in it, that won’t happen. In 2005 the Stones entered into a conservation easement with the California Rangeland Trust as the easement holder, permanently assuring that the land will continue as working rangeland. The success of the transaction is causing other ranchers to look into protecting their land in a similar way.

### Conservation Partners

- Audubon California
- California Cattlemen’s Association
- CALFIRE
- California Rangeland Trust
- Center For Land Based Learning



Huff pond: Pond was fenced off to protect water quality of pond, and water gravity fed down to a trough for cattle to use.



South Edgar slope: Steep slopes and shallow slopes can lead to serious runoff and erosion problems if livestock are not managed properly.