

An Interview with Joe Pozzi on Carbon Farming and the Future of Sustainable Ranching

By Isis Howard of the Gold Ridge RCD

What motivated you to create a Carbon Farm Plan?

I have always been interested in implementing conservation practices on my ranches. Improving the soil, plants, and water quality on my ranch also improves my production capabilities and enhances the natural resources here. When I heard about a carbon farm plan which could help quantify the amount of carbon I am sequestering off of the practices on my ranch, I became very interested to see what it was all about.

How did Gold Ridge RCD help you create your Carbon Farm Plan?

The Gold Ridge RCD was a great help putting the plan together with me. With their assistance, I was able to develop a plan which established a baseline for what I have here, now, as well as develop projects for future implementation that would increase my carbon sequestration amount.

Why invest in the process?

By developing a carbon farm plan for my ranch, I'm able to gain so much more information about the health of my ranch and the steps I need to take to enhance the natural resources I have here. The information gathered through the carbon farm plan is so valuable, not only to me as I implement practices on my ranch, but also to the public, who I sell my products to, so they understand the importance of farmland in our region and how it offsets the carbon being produced by others.

What are some examples of Carbon Farming practices utilized at Pozzi Ranch?

Some of the projects I have implemented are cross fencing for animal rotational grazing, pasture reseeding, water development, strategic location of water troughs to utilize all the forage being produced on the ranch, and compost application, which increases the water holding capacity by about 28,000 gallons per acre, which in turn creates more forage for my animals as well as more plant life for increased sequestration of carbon.

Future projects include hedgerows for wind erosion reduction, continued development of riparian corridors, which will include tree and shrub planting in the riparian areas for increased wildlife habitat as well as erosion control and increased carbon sequestration. I also am planning to do a water catchment system to reduce the energy of pumping from the aquifer in our area.

What are the greatest challenges you see in implementing a Carbon Farm Plan?

Cost is the biggest challenge, but the Gold Ridge RCD, Marin County RCD, and the NRCS all have funds available which can be a tremendous help.

What does the future of sustainability look like to you?

Sustainability, to me, means improving what I have through conservation practices to enhance the land as well as producing a quality product off of my ranch so that it's economically viable. It also means coexisting with the wildlife on my property to ensure a healthy ecosystem for all that are here.

What does the future of sustainable ranching look like in Sonoma County?

A lot has changed in the past year. Sustainable ranching in Sonoma county is all about food security and distribution. It's very important for those producing food and fiber in our county have the ability to distribute it directly to the consumers at a price which justifies a viable business for the landowner. In my opinion, it's so important to have quality food products grown locally for local consumers. This COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the weaknesses in depending on our food and fiber coming from other countries or far reaches of our country.

As a rancher, what do you see as the greatest challenge in reducing your impacts on our climate?

A lot of times Livestock production is blamed for greenhouse gas emissions in our country and world. With the shutdown of the economy of the economy this past April and May when millions of cars were off the roads does not burning fossil fuels our air Quality increased by a huge amount. If we could continue this practice of people working at their homes and doing less commuting it would be a huge step in helping the climate change issues.

For me personally if I can do my part by increasing the sequestration of carbon on the land I own and manage it would be a benefit for all.

As you move toward sustainability, how do you see this impacting your products in terms of quality and marketing?

When I sell my products to consumers and they see the practices I am implementing to enhance the natural resources on my property and the interaction and coexistence I have with the wildlife and birdlife on my property, they feel like they're part of my team, and I feel like I'm part of their team. When I have a consumer who sources my products because they believe in what I am doing, we have a partnership in the sustainability of me as a rancher and, for them, the security of knowing there's food and fiber being produced for them locally.

How do we see the expression of sustainable farming practices in your products?

By marketing my Lamb and Wool products directly to the consumer, I have an opportunity to educate and share my ranching experiences directly with the people who are purchasing my products. If a consumer purchases my products they are in turn assisting me in continued enhancement of my properties by implementing more carbon sequestration practices. The consumers are also being educated about the importance of local productive land in areas where they live.

How has your relationship with soil, or other natural resources, changed since beginning the Carbon Farming process?

I have always been interested in conservation practices, like I said earlier, but the carbon farm plan takes it to the next level; it gives me more knowledge of why I'm doing the things that I am doing and helps me set goals for projects I can implement in the future.

The biggest thing it gives me is the ability to quantify how much carbon I am actually sequestering, which is a huge opportunity to promote the value of protecting local farming communities in our region for both farmers and ranchers, like myself, and the consumers and public who live in the region with us.

Is there anything else you'd like to share about Pozzi Ranch, your personal/business values, Carbon Farm Planning, or working with RCDs?

My dad, Ed, was a board member of the Marin County RCD for about 30 years. I have been the district manager at the Gold Ridge resource conservation district since 1994. I have always been interested in improving our lands and by having the resource conservation districts and the natural resource conservation service working with me to increase my knowledge and bring in new ideas it's been a great experience. I think it's important to interact with the public as much as possible to share with them our story and why it's important to protect farmland in our region.