



ROMINGER BROTHERS FARMS

Stewardship Profiles in California Agriculture

Environmental Leadership with Water Efficiency, Biodiversity, Habitat Restoration and Pollinator Services

Bruce Rominger is a fifth generation farmer in Winters California. Bruce earned his degree at UC Davis and then returned to the farm, where he has worked with his brother Rick ever since. The Rominger Brothers Farm covers roughly 4,000 acres, some leased, on which they grow processing tomatoes, rice, sunflowers, wheat, almonds, corn, wine grape rootstocks, and walnuts. Bruce notes that they grow eight to twelve different crops at a time for diversification and often in response to landowner requests.

In addition to their farming operation, Bruce's wife Robyn runs Rominger Trails, which provides rangeland trails for local horse riders. Rominger Trails provides a venue for the community to interact with the farming operation through public access and agrotourism.

PROBLEM

As the effects of the drought have become more prominent in recent years, Rominger Brothers Farm has implemented water use efficiency practices. In addition to their water efficiency improvements, the Rominger brothers have also worked to address the loss of and wildlife habitat.

SOLUTION IMPLEMENTATION AND MANAGEMENT

A major component of the Rominger Brothers Farm's stewardship has been its transition to drip irrigation. Bruce says the process has taken ten years and a involved steep learning curve. He believes that the time and capital investment has paid off in less erosion and fertilizer pollution via runoff, in addition to increased water efficiency.

ACHIEVEMENTS

- 40-50% of all acreage has been transitioned to drip irrigation
- Increased habitat for beneficial insects and pollinators
- Decreased soil erosion and fertilizer pollution via runoff



"I can't think of a better business than growing food!"

-Bruce Rominger

The brothers have transitioned 40 to 50 percent of all of their acreage and all of their tomatoes to drip irrigation. Through their use of tensiometers, they can track the efficiency of their drip systems, but Bruce emphasizes that it is important to actually go out into the field, feel the soil and look at the plants in order to monitor field conditions and to make decisions. During tomato season, Bruce monitors plant evapotranspiration and receives an electronically generated report every day from the fields.

To reduce their reliance on electricity, the Rominger brothers have installed a handful of solar pumps on wells throughout their rangelands. They are interested in utilizing more solar power in the future.

The brothers have also worked to preserve and increase biodiversity by establishing hedgerows around their tomato fields. Initially their goal was to provide habitat for beneficial insects, but over time they found that the hedgerows also encourage pollinators. Environmental stewardship is a Rominger family value; Bruce says that when his father and uncle operated the farm, they built over twenty stock ponds in the hills throughout the farm. Years later, these stock ponds still provide wildlife habitat across the operation.

CHALLENGES/OBSTACLES OVERCOME

According to Bruce, transitioning to drip irrigation was difficult because of the expense of installing drip, approximately \$1,400 per acre. Aside from the cost, installing drip on leased land is subject to an additional challenge: in order to see a return on their investment, farmers must have a long-term lease in place. Securing these leases has protracted the Rominger's transition, adding to the pressure imposed by the drought; the need for efficient irrigation became even more poignant as the brothers were forced to drill additional wells and fallow fields. He concludes that although drip has been a huge capital investment, he believes it has been worth the money.

With regards to improving wildlife habitat, the brothers have had to mitigate for previously removed oaks and grasses. Although the state is offering incentives to plant new trees and native grasses under Assembly Bill 32's greenhouse gas cap-and-trade program, Bruce says the process to get paid for these activities has been tedious, making it more of a challenge to balance the economic and environmental benefits of increasing carbon through wildlife habitat improvements. Despite these difficulties, Bruce says it is worth it. He wants to "make sure the land can be farmed in 200 years, no matter who is doing the farming."

STEWARDSHIP PRACTICES



Water Efficiency



Biodiversity



Habitat Restoration



Pollinator Services



PROJECT PARTNERS

- University of California, Davis

MEASURING SUCCESS

As a result of best management practices on The Rominger Brothers Farm and Rominger Trails, the farm has become a model for stewardship and sustainability. As Bruce puts it, “it is important to be part of the solution” to the problems facing modern agriculture, especially with regard to water conservation.

Bruce feels that his biggest accomplishment has been his lifetime of work. He takes pride in his care of the farm in maintaining and improving the land. Through his collaboration with researchers and UC Davis, Bruce notes that one of his accomplishments promoting public private partnerships by receiving various grants that help support biodiversity enhancements, such as hedgerows.

For more information about the stewardship practices discussed in this profile, please contact the farmer directly. You can reach Bruce Rominger by email to rombros@pacbell.net.



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