



# *Texas Section Society for Range Management*

## **Richards Ranch Outstanding Rangeland Management Award - 2004**

*BACKGROUND on the ORM Award: The ORM Award is reserved for those who have demonstrated standing skill and knowledge in practicing sound management and care of rangeland resources. This is a competitive award, and only one award will be presented each year. The award is linked to the ranch, not the individual(s).*

The 15,000 acre Richards Ranch in Jack County is recognized for their exceptional land management and conservation.

The Richards Ranch has been a family operation for 139 years. Three individuals who have contributed to the exceptional management and long term commitment to the conservation, stewardship and sustainability of the Richards Ranch are Henry Richards, John Hackley and Brent Hackley. John Hackley, general manager for the ranch, stated that *“sustainability of our grazing land is crucial to the continued success of our family business.”* The ranch goals include a profitable and sustainable business environment that will allow them to enjoy their heritage of ranching, its way of life, to live off of the land, to be able to sustain this heritage for future generations, and leave the land better than it was received. The mission statement for the ranch is to preserve the land base by improving the ecosystem, so that we can contribute to the welfare, happiness, and economic levels of the family, employees, and industries identified with ranching, the local community and the world at large.

The ranch has a variety of native grasses, including but not limited to, big bluestem, little bluestem, indiangrass, texas wintergrass, and sideoats grama. There is open prairie with mesquite encroachment and outcroppings of post-oak timber. A brangus cow/calf enterprise is run on the ranch with stocker steers supplemented as needed. The land was originally managed in three to four thousand acre pastures of continuous grazing. The ranch has been fenced and is being operated in 48 pastures. This intensive management system has allowed them to successfully double the conventional stocking rate in most years, and still have good stands of grass available. The grasses have become denser, there is more litter, and they have achieved more effective use of rainfall. Now it takes a storm in excess of three inches to achieve runoff to fill stock tanks. Wildlife populations, such as deer and turkey, have increased with this planned rotational grazing. The Richards Ranch management team believes that if you want to have a lush plant community to feed wildlife and cattle, and provide cover for vulnerable offspring, you need to manage the land to create that outcome.



John Hackley, Richards Ranch manager, and Charlie Hart, TSSRM President.

They have always been careful to leave sufficient forage after grazing to allow rapid recovery from grazing. They ensure high animal performance by returning to graze a pasture when it has recovered leaf area but before it produces many seed heads and declines in nutritive content. This is difficult to accomplish in a variable climate but they have managed to do so by have a “spare” pasture that could be grazed if it was too early to return to one of the rotation systems.

It also became obvious that in order to sustain the business for the future, production needed to be diversified. With increasing wildlife populations, hunting became an option for diversification. The ranch entered into a wildlife management program to hunt and manage the wildlife populations. An investment in a hunting lodge and its growth into a retreat center provided year round opportunities for diversification into nature tourism and ranch experiences.

The Richards Ranch has a very strong conservation ethic and they thoroughly study and research before implementing any changes. They continually work on trying to improve the business and the quality of life of those involved in the family business. They have managed extremely well to come together and work together as a family to achieve success.

*“We are striving to maximize the use of the land” states John Hackley. “That includes diversification in hunting and tourism, as well as maximizing profits in the beef production business by managing for maximum amounts of forage per acre, thus creating real wealth. In order to achieve our quality of life and production goals, we are working for prairies with a variety of high quality forage, dependable and ample water supplies, with a proper balance of timber and wildlife populations.”*

***The Texas Section Society for Range Management is proud to recognize the Richards Ranch with this Outstanding Rangeland Management Award.*** TSSRM is a professional organization composed of individuals sharing a common interest in the study, management and rational use of rangelands and related ecosystems. For more information on TSSRM, visit their website at [www.tssrm.org](http://www.tssrm.org).

***Would you join me in honoring the Richards Ranch for their accomplishments and winning the 2004 Outstanding Rangeland Management Award.***