



*2010 TSSRM President Bill Pinchak with Bob and Wanda Kilmer*

## **Texas Section Society for Range Management**

Outstanding Rangeland Stewardship Award 2010  
**MATADOR RANCH \* MATADOR, TEXAS**

Matador Ranch  
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Matador Ranch is a 130,000-acre working cattle ranch that supports more than 3,000 head of commercial cattle, 1,500 to 2,500 stockers, annually as well as diverse wildlife management program.

Matador Ranch is one of three ranches operated by The Matador Cattle Company, a subsidiary of Koch Industries, Inc., based in Wichita, Kan.

**Ecological setting:** Matador Ranch lies primarily on the Rolling Plains of Texas, although the western edge touches the Caprock or High Plains escarpment. Topography and vegetation are very diverse. Terrain and plant communities vary from relatively flat midgrass areas of sidecoats grama to

the rough broken slopes supporting redberry juniper-midgrass or shin oak. Gently rolling hills support a little bluestem-sideoats grama communities. Other widespread plants include mesquite, lotebush, juniper, prickly pear, blue grama, Texas wintergrass, vine-mesquite and Arizona cottontop. A large and diverse component of forbs and legumes and other grasses and woody plants are often found. Much of the ranch lies above the Seymour Aquifer, whose spring water is pumped to manmade earthen tanks by windmills or via pipelines. The Middle Pease and Tongue rivers traverse the ranch, along with various wet-weather creeks.

### **Sustainability on the Ground**

Matador Ranch's vision is to manage its natural resources in a manner that allows it to create real long-term value. That is founded on the market-based approach that all decisions must be made to ensure long-term productivity and sustainability while positioning itself to increase value and capture market opportunities. Each stewardship decision is measured for its impact on and benefit to wildlife and beef production. Their results show that managing and improving the ranch's natural resources is compatible with beef and wildlife production. With the challenging aspects of the ranch's terrain and inconsistent rainfall, Bob Kilmer and his team ensure that all resource decisions made consider not only the primary effects but also the secondary and tertiary effects.

### **Resource management:**

To continuously improve the long-term health and productivity of its renewable natural resources, the ranch employs a number of programs and works with several different organizations. In the early 1980s, ranch management began experimenting with seeding improved grasses – specifically Ermelo Weeping Lovegrass – to supplement the native grasses available. In the late 1980s much of the Matador's farmland – primarily cotton fields – was converted to improved pasture, specifically W.W. Spar bluestem. The ranch uses high-density, short-duration grazing cells. It also uses about 3,200 acres of improved pasture in order to rest native grass pastures.

Matador Ranch was an early adopter of artificial insemination to improve cowherd genetics. This technology remains in use with some of the ranch's heifers bred artificially each year. The ranch has improved the overall performance of its calves in both feeding and carcass traits while maintaining the reproductive performance of its cow herd. The ranch also runs stocker cattle, which are purchased and wintered on native grasses then transitioned to introduced grass pastures within an intensive grazing system. At various times, the ranch will retain ownership of its calf crop or stocker cattle. These cattle are fed in northern feedlots and marketed on various different market grids. Careful resource stewardship has allowed the ranch's stocking rate to return to one AU/30-acre rate from one AU/ 55-acre rate during drought conditions. During the drought of the late '90s, Matador destocked the ranch by 50 percent rather than hurt its resources.

### **Protecting, enhancing water resources**

Optimally managing the ranch's water resources includes brush management, developing more earthen tanks, improving the security of existing dams, managing spring-fed tanks, and utilizing a water piping system to move water from various parts of the ranch. To increase the ranch's capacity for rest rotational cells, a 50-plus mile water pipeline system was built in 1996, and has been expanded. The goal is to install five to 15 miles of pipelines annually into pastures for wildlife and livestock use. Culverts have been plugged along an abandoned railroad right-of-way to provide additional water sources. During the drought, many earthen tanks were cleaned to improve water-holding capacity. Brush has been cleared along roads for better access to hunting sites, which has

resulted in improved quail habitat. In areas of historical erosion problems, grasses have been seeded and old hay bales have been strategically placed in various pastures to thwart wind erosion.

The ranch has strategically controlled brush through mechanical and chemical methods to improve nesting cover for quail and turkeys, while promoting forage production and diversity. Prescribed burning is used along with other conservation practices such as brush control to achieve a more diverse habitat and a higher successional stage on their rangeland. The ranch began a comprehensive prescribed burning program in 2009, as range conditions allowed. Prescribed burning on the ranch is set up through a long-range planning schedule, which allows the ranch to better achieve objectives. The mechanical treatments have improved forb diversity by creating soil disturbance. The ranch uses a global positioning system to select the most dense areas of mesquite/brush infestations to spray. Long-range planning for prescribed burning has to be flexible to allow for more efficiency when application time for the burn arrives. Matador Ranch has found that the real key is to properly manage the land following the burn.

**Wildlife management:** In the past 20 years, income from hunting has grown steadily – and sometimes exponentially – at the ranch. With the opportunity to cater to clients who desire trophy animals, in 2008, Matador Ranch expanded its wildlife program to include a lodge and other assets designed to satisfy customers. In addition, the ranch is applying its livestock breeding knowledge to a deer breeding program aimed at not only developing client-preferred trophy animals for the ranch but also to market does and bucks to a growing Texas and national market. The ranch's wildlife management program is multi-faceted and all decisions are evaluated with the livestock business in mind. For its deer program – which includes both whitetail and mule deer – the ranch conducts annual fall helicopter surveys to determine density, sex ratios, and fawn survival. Surveys guide harvest recommendations and monitor herd health. Harvest data is collected from all deer taken on the ranch. Harvest management goals for deer include no more than 10 percent of the available mule deer bucks and 15 percent of the available whitetail bucks. Turkey harvest has been limited to less than 30 percent of mature gobblers each year and varies depending on range conditions.

**Outcomes:** In their own words Matador Ranch states “As stewards of the land, we have to fully partner with Mother Nature. To successfully do that in the face of prolonged droughts, we have to optimally conserve our natural resources – or we will be out of business. As a result of our dedication to market-based principles and strategies, Matador Ranch has achieved a number of successes in ensuring that its natural resources are not only being used to produce a customer-preferred product but also that it is improving the base resource for the long term.”

Matador Ranch believes that the ranch's long-term viability and success is based upon our company's business philosophy – Market Based Management®. MBM empowers employees to think like owners – and positions them to respond to the desires of the marketplace. The ranch has a strong tradition and history, yet they are focused on marrying that with the innovations of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Their branding patterns may be more rooted in 1900, but their breeding systems employ the best information and technologies available. Koch Industries expects all its subsidiaries to be industry leaders. Matador Ranch has proven that industry success can in fact be accomplished, with rangeland stewardship leading the way.

**Accepting for Matador Ranch are:  
Bob and Wanda Kilmer (VP and Ranch Manager)**