Doug Beretta recalls as he got older and more involved in the dairy he realized the benefit of taking care of the land by giving back to it.

Beretta’s grandfather first purchased the dairy property along the Laguna de Santa Rosa in 1948 and soon after began the start of what is the existing Beretta Family Dairy. Doug remembers feeling lucky about living on the 400 acres as a kid where he could ride motorcycles, pheasant hunt and watch his dad and grandfather make the land they owned profitable. As a third generation dairy farmer, Doug recalls as he got older and more involved in the dairy that he realized the benefit of taking care of the land by giving back to it. “We were always taught that you milked as many cows as the land could handle,” Doug said. “This has kept our farm what it is today.”

Throughout the decades the Beretta’s have continued to be open and innovative in their management of natural resources, while sustaining their family dairy business. In the 1950s, the dairy was an early adopter of environmentally friendly practices, when they stopped using chemical fertilizers, emphasized raising herds in pastures and growing their own feed, and in 2007 the Beretta Family Dairy became 100% certified organic. Over the years the dairy avoided the need for groundwater pumping by being one of the first producers in the area to accept the City of Santa Rosa’s recycled water for irrigation. This water is a valuable resource to these landowners in producing forage for cows even in months of little rain.

Over the years, Beretta has served as a leader for the dairy industry through his involvement in the local agricultural community. In the face of agricultural regulations, Beretta felt it was important to help educate others about dairy operations because “the perception of what we were doing at the time was flawed”. In the mid-2000s, when faced with the listing of the California Tiger Salamander (CTS) as a federally endangered species, Beretta met the challenge on behalf of local agricultural producers by participating on the Sonoma County CTS Task Force, and by serving as an advocate and educator to his fellow dairy producers. Offering site tours of the dairy to regulatory agencies and elected officials was one way he helped provide first-hand knowledge and dispel misperceptions. In late 2015, Beretta was recognized by the North Coast Water Quality Control Board with their Executive Directors 2015 Water Quality Stewardship Award for the exemplary performance in the management of the dairy operations.

Over the decades working with agencies such as the Sonoma Resource Conservation District (RCD) and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) on water quality, nutrient and pasture management projects helped the Beretta’s to improve the management and operation of the dairy, while continuing to be proactive with regard to natural resources. “We always tried to work with the RCD or other agencies to fix problems before they become issues,” Beretta states.

Most recently Beretta Family Dairy was one of the first properties to work with the RCD and the City of Santa Rosa on a voluntary nutrient offset project that involved the installation of water quality and drainage improvements on the dairy. Doug feels that working with the RCD on these types of improvements makes the land better and the management easier. “Cost share programs and the knowledge of [RCD] staff really does help get projects done,” Beretta concluded.

In addition to working closely with agencies, the dairy has long supported agricultural education programs to inspire youth to connect with local food systems. Through the RCD’s FARMs Leadership Program, the dairy has hosted hundreds of local students at their dairy for a series of years, as well as other leadership programs sponsored by the Sonoma County Farm Bureau. The dairy has provided numerous youth invaluable experiences through opportunities to be immersed in how an agricultural operation functions, allowing students to meet a dairy cow for the first time or to taste organic local milk products derived from the dairy, while at the same time discussing environmental regulations and seeing ways natural resources can be conserved. Investing in youth agricultural education can be seen as an investment in the future, where today’s young people will be the decision makers and leaders of tomorrow in this county and beyond.

The family’s tradition of leadership continues today with Beretta’s daughter, Jennifer, participating on various boards and committees, including those for the Sonoma County Fair, the Sonoma County Farm Bureau, the Ag Trust Board for the Santa Rosa Junior College, 4-H and Future Farmers of America. His son, Ryan, is also heavily involved in the day to day operations at the dairy and supporting the implementation of conservation projects on the dairy.

Profile in Stewardship—Beretta Family Dairy

The RCD appreciates our partnership with Doug Beretta and the Beretta Family Dairy, and looks forward to continued work together. Our “Profiles in Stewardship” articles are snapshots about local farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners that have participated in the RCD’s programs and implemented conservation practices to protect the environment and natural resources that we all depend on.