

2018 NC Environmental Stewardship Award Application

Section 1. Description of the operation

Ronnie Holman - Hardrock Beef Cattle

Family: Father - Ronald, Wife - Donna, Children - Erin & Travis, Grandchildren - Dylan

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Farm Locations - Hardrock Beef Cattle operates in two locations. There is 30 acres in the Baton community of Caldwell County where the Holman family resides. They also farm over 400 acres of leased land in the Gilkey community of Rutherford County.

What is the nature of the business? Describe the cattle enterprise (cow/calf, stocker, combination) and other diversified business activities.

Hardrock Beef Cattle is a registered Red Angus and Red Sim-Angus operation. The farm philosophy focuses on breeding and raising efficient cattle for forage based environments. They strive to breed cattle that not only survive but flourish on fescue based grazing systems. Ronnie Holman believes the further cattle are removed from harvesting available forages for themselves, the less efficient his operation becomes.

Animals that do not make the cut for breeding stock are marketed through one of two grass fed programs. The steers go to Hickory Nut Gap Farm's grass fed beef and the heifers are marketed via Hardrock Beef Cattle's own freezer beef program.

History of the operation (length of ownership, changes in the operation over time, acreage, herd numbers, etc.).

Ronnie's grandfather gave Ronnie the nickname Hardrock when he was a youngster. When he decided to get into the cattle business he just thought it appropriate to include this in the farm name. That is why the farm is called Hardrock Beef Cattle.

The Caldwell County farm has been in the family since the early 1900s. This land has been in agricultural production the entire time. Hardrock Beef Cattle (HBC) was established in 2000 when the Holman family began showing cattle and wanted to promote their breeding stock to those passing through the show barn.



There was a need to expand beyond the family land in Caldwell County. A partnership led to the expansion into Rutherford County. Currently Hardrock Beef Cattle leases over 400 contiguous acres in the Gilkey Community. The grassland is all grazed. Ronnie has no hay making equipment.

Currently the herd consists of 100 breeding females. Heifers are developed close to home in Caldwell County. Genetics to improve the base herd are brought in as frozen semen, live bulls, and occasionally females are purchased. One thing that has remained steadfast since 2000 is the focus on Red Angus genetics. More recently Ronnie has added Sim-Angus cattle to his system. This addition has added growth and carcass cutability to his cattle.

Brief description of natural resources on the farm (types of forages, terrain, and water resources).

The two farm locations are both in the western piedmont of North Carolina. The land is typical piedmont topography with rolling hills. The upland fields are predominantly heavy clay soils with the bottomland soils being lighter in texture.

Though there are many miles of streams on the farms, Ronnie decided early on that cattle should be excluded from direct access to the streams. He partners with the Soil & Water Conservation Districts to protect and improve the natural resources and uses grazing management - rotational grazing and management intensive grazing - to improve the soils. Ronnie's philosophy is that he is only borrowing the land and it should be improved for those who will use the land in the future.

Endophyte infected tall fescue is the main forage. However, Ronnie has experimented with annuals such as “Ray’s Crazy Mix” as well as single species plantings of forage sorghums.

Ronnie maintains the endophyte infected fescue based forage system because he wants to raise breeding stock in the same environment that his customers have. However, Ronnie still works hard to minimize the influence of fescue toxicosis through management. This includes managing seedheads in the spring, feeding conserved forages (when needed) in the fall, and moving to stockpiled fescue when the alkaloids are lowest in the winter.

Ronnie is a model cattlemen. He is always looking to improve how he farms. He maintains current soil test records on his pasture land. He tests his purchased forages and balances the ration to meet the animals nutritional requirements. He has a breeding soundness exam on bulls he plans to use before the start of the breeding season.

List organizations that the farm has interacted with in environmental efforts.

2017 Wilkes Area Beef Conference Presenter

2017-18 President of the Red Angus Association of the Carolinas

2016 Organic Growers School Presenter

2014 Soil & Water Conservation District - Farm Family of the Year - District winner

2013 Rutherford County Forage Farmer of the Year—Given by Rutherford Cattlemen’s Association

2012 President, NC Forage & Grassland Council

2012 Panel Member for the NCFGC Mid-Winter Conference “Dealing with High Input Costs”

2004-14 Secretary/Treasurer of Red Angus Association of the Carolinas

Farm was Animal Welfare Approved since 2010

Caldwell County Economic Development Commission Board of Directors

NC Forage & Grassland Council Board of Directors (2009-2014)

American Forage and Grasslands Council Board of Director

Past President – Caldwell Cattlemen’s Association (4 terms)

Caldwell Cattlemen’s Association Board Member

NC Cattlemen’s Association Board of Directors

Caldwell Extension Center Advisory Board Member

Catawba Valley Youth Beef Expo Board Member

NC Jr. Beef RoundUp Supporter

Section 2. Stewardship practices and achievements.

Describe the resource management goals and accomplishments in terms of stewardship and conservation. Describe specific, innovative practices that involve energy conservation, wildlife habitat enhancement, manure management, improvements in air quality, improvements in drinking water delivery, and other practices designed to protect surface waters.

At the Caldwell farm, fencing, gates, and drinkers were installed to exclude animals from streams and environmentally sensitive areas. This was accomplished with 4,679 linear feet of fencing, 640 feet pipe and 3 waters sited on heavy use gravel pads. These practices were implemented as a better way to water cattle and to protect the streambanks from erosion.

During winter feeding animals were damaging the pasture. A heavy use area was added in conjunction with the waste storage and feeding structure. The heavy use area is approximately .1 acre. The waste storage and feeding structure is approximately 28 x 60 with additional 15' wings added on each side.

The additional wings were added to include an integral cattle working/handling facility and equipment and storage. The working facility is designed to be a one person low stress working facility. Manure from this feeding structure is applied to pastures.



Ronnie follows prescribed grazing practices that protect water quality of nearby streams and improve soil and plant health and productivity.

At the Rutherford properties, Ronnie worked with the ten landowners from whom he leases land to agree to conservation practices prescribed by the Rutherford Soil & water Conservation District. The landowners agreed to maintain practices for 10 years. This totaled 16,643 feet of exclusion fencing, a well, 22 waterers and heavy use pads, four stream crossings, and a pump station.

All of this infrastructure has created 25 grazing paddocks on 238 acres. This allows animals to be moved through the paddocks based on grass growth and availability. Ronnie continues to work to eliminate erosion and improve the system for grazing. This includes building access roads and adding additional fencing.

Below is a summary of the improvement practices on the two farms.

Infrastructure improvements to the Caldwell farm since 2000:

- 4,679 linear feet of cross & exclusion fencing
- 733 feet pipe
- 5 watering tanks
- Heavy Use Areas (waste storage & feeding structure and watering tanks)
- 30x28 waste storage & feeding structure

Infrastructure improvements to the Rutherford farm since 2013:

- 42,223 linear feet of perimeter, exclusion, and cross fencing
- Well and pumping plant
- 4 stream crossings
- 22 drinkers on heavy use gravel pads
- 250 feet Access Road
- Prescribed grazing plan

Section 3. Describe how the producer practices environmental stewardship as a part of their management program.

How has a stewardship philosophy impacted management strategies, implementation of land improvements, and other activities that improve the public perception of cattle farming in North Carolina?

Ronnie Holman states “Our ranch goal is to provide/feed a number of God’s children with a quality eating experience and be good stewards of the environment entrusted to us.”.

All along, Ronnie Holman has worked toward this goal. He has tried to better manage his forage resources and buy the small amount of hay needed each year. To focus on forage production also means



focusing on the environment and improving the sustainability of the land entrusted to him. By managing the grazing, animal productivity and the environment can both be improved. Healthy grass stands meet the nutritional needs of cattle, but also stop erosion and water run-off in pastures. A healthy stand of grass increases water infiltration,

which provides a positive feedback on both forage production as well as the environment. Water infiltration into the soil improves plant health, soil, and the stability and function of streams.

Ronnie has learned that cattle farming is much more pleasant when we can just check our cows, their water, and mineral supply every day or two rather than feeding hay or grain every day.

Include any leadership activities of the producer that have improved the adoption of a stewardship philosophy among other producers.

Ronnie likes to talk with people. He finds he can learn more from listening than talking. However, he does like to share with other people and farmers. Part of that is sharing what he has learned and tried on his farm.

Being in a leadership role allows him to meet with a wide variety of people in the industry and have an influence on their thinking. Ronnie has served the local cattle industry as President, Vice President, and a board member of the Caldwell County Cattlemen’s Association. He has served at the State level with the

NC Forage and Grasslands Council and as a board member for the NC Cattlemen's Association and the American Forage and Grasslands Council.

Also include any involvement the producer has had in environmental research, and any other activities the producer has been involved in that promote a positive public image.

Ronnie is currently participating in a Fescue Pasture Monitoring Project with Dr. Glen E Aiken, Director of the USDA/ARS Forage-Animal Production Research Unit in Lexington, KY. Dr. Aiken wants to understand how toxic alkaloid levels change in fescue from month to month and year to year. This project has one or two locations in Missouri, Arkansas, Kentucky, South Carolina, and North Carolina.

In addition, Hardrock Beef Cattle has cooperated with NC State University and NC Cooperative Extension on several management studies and demonstrations. These includes in 2012 a fescue winter stockpiling study and field day.

In 2014, Ronnie hosted a field day at his farm in Rutherford County to demonstrate how to set a cow up for AI breeding and share how synchronizing can allow you to breed on your own schedule and also tighten up your calving season. Steve Gordon from ABS also demonstrated how to insert a CIDR to start the sync process and he talked about a program ABS offers to producers for some really good genetics. Albert Moore spoke about cost share programs available through NRCS and Rutherford Soil and Water.



Image: Photos taken during the May 3rd, 2014 Rutherford County Cattlemen's educational program.

In 2015, Ronnie cooperated on a chemical seedhead suppression trial to manage toxic fescue in the spring. The product used was a herbicide called Chaparral. This trial included a summer pasture walk to show off the demonstration to other grazers.



Image: Ronnie Holman applying Chaparral herbicide for a tall fescue seedhead suppression experiment with NC State University and NC Cooperative Extension.

Convert the document to a pdf format and email to: Matt_Poore@ncsu.edu

Please submit your nomination by email.

The nomination packet should be submitted by January 10, 2018.