

Conservation *Showcase*

From healing people to healing the land

As a registered nurse, Naomi Ferreira helped people heal.
As a farmer, she's helping the land heal.

Nurse Ferreira served active duty in the U.S. Air Force for two years, then for another 24 years in the Reserves, until returning full-time back to her 250-plus acre farm in Yacolt, Washington. Farmer Ferreira now spends her time caring for 250 head of cattle and enjoying the land she loves – adorned with plush-green pastures and tree-lined serpentine creeks.

But the scene here hasn't always been so bucolic.

"I have pictures when I was a little girl and there wasn't a tree on the place – because of the '29 fire," Ferreira says. "It was just burned off land – a stump farm. We could only feed about 13 cattle, because there just wasn't any pasture," she says.

Through the years, Ferreira and her family have developed more pasture and watering facilities; replanted forests; and fenced off riparian areas. Through their work with the Clark Conservation District, Ferreira has invested significant labor and money to restore and protect more than 1800 feet of riparian buffers along Yacolt Creek and its tributaries.

For the spry 72-year-old, it's been a labor of love.

"Some people look at all of the trees we've planted and see money. I look at them and see trees." –Naomi Ferreira

For Ferreira, her land has been the source of enjoyment. "It's a joy to get up and have something to get out of the house to go do. And around here, there's always something to do."

But running a cow-calf operation is a labor-intensive, sometimes back-breaking endeavor. Cows have to be moved from pasture to pasture; calves must be delivered and weaned; feeding barns must be cleaned; and animal waste must be stored and composted.



Showing no signs of slowing down at 72, Naomi Ferreira raises some 250 head of cattle while caring for the land she loves.

Conservation Showcase (continued)



The cattle that are a part of Naomi Ferreira's farming operation near Yacolt, Wash., are a source of pride and joy for the 72-year-old farmer.

Getting older means Ferreira cannot do all of things she used to be able to do. To help her address water quality issues, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) recently provided technical and financial assistance through its Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to build a waste storage structure and waste transfer structure.

"Having this waste storage facility has been a real blessing," she says. "It means I can clean the barn in just a few minutes on the tractor and use the tractor to lift the bales of hay. I'd have never been able to build it without the assistance of the NRCS," she says.

For her part, Ferreira used money from her retirement account to pay for her portion of the waste storage facility. "And my retirement account has to keep putting hay in the barn because the cows don't understand the word 'no,'" says Ferreira.

NRCS Soil Conservationist Lisa Schuchman says EQIP has been put to good use protecting water quality and helping people like Ferreira stay on the farm. "There's tremendous development pressure in this area. It is challenging for farmers to keep a viable agriculture operation alive. When farms stop production, the land is often sold and sub-divided for development," she says. "So it's good to see that we can use these programs to protect key resources and help keep working farms in production."

Despite all of her accomplishments on the land, Ferreira is reluctant to take credit for the obvious terrestrial transformation that has occurred as the result of her loving hand.

"I look around and think God put it all here," she says. "We just take care of it."



Naomi Ferreira (left) and NRCS Soil Conservationist Lisa Schuchman review the farm's conservation plan in the shade of a recently built waste storage facility.