New Mexico's recent drought has called on the state's best land stewards to persevere and protect New Mexico's finest farms and ranches.

Among the best of the best were Tuda Libby Crews and Jack Crews from the Ute Creek Cattle Company in northeastern New Mexico. They exemplify what conservation planning and good stewardship can do. They have demonstrated what it takes to tend the land, while raising top quality cattle.

Monitoring documentation showed 75 percent bare ground in 2003, and in 2004, the Ute Creek Cattle Company could hardly place the monitoring frame on the ground due to the abundant forage in 2005.

Ute Creek riparian restoration included salt cedar control and fencing through NRCS programs. Willows, cottonwoods, and wildlife are returning voluntarily.

The USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Doing all the ...

Right Things

Conservation Planning

SMARTER FARMERS

WISER RANCHERS

WHAT IT TAKES

It takes record keeping to make those wise decisions during both good years and bad. Records that help ranchers include:

Types of animal
Size (weight)
Numbers
Date in – date out of each pasture
Supplemental feed used
Watering supply
Pasture size and numbers

For information about conservation planning contact the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office nearest you.

Surviving the Drought at Ute Creek Cattle Company

2002

- Continuing drought (4 inches of precipitation compared to average 16-inch annual rainfall) forced de-stocking of cowherd by 30%
- Banked additional winter pasture into rotational grazing plan
- Fed cowherd year-round to maintain nutritional levels for critical lactation/breed-back. Retained minimum number of replacement heifers to keep cattle numbers low.
- Worked closely with NRCS to develop a Conservation Plan, which included CCRP and EQIP contracts, a water distribution system and salt cedar control project.

2003

- Continuing drought required additional de-stocking by 20%
- Extended feeding program to maintain essential nutritional levels in cowherd
- In December, revised drought management plan based upon a carefully calculated assessment of available forage.
- Intensely managed rotational grazing system under severely depleted range conditions.

2004

- Cowherd reduced to less than 200 cows to cope with continuing drought.
- Consulted with range specialist. After reviewing drought management plan, reached consensus to find pasture to lease, or liquidate the cowherd. Two neighboring families leased pasture fourteen miles to the east and took all the cattle off of both ranches.
- In June, it RAINED. In the following six months, received 22 inches of rain. The entire ranch was rested for five months during the growing season, and resulted in jump-starting rangeland recovery.

2005

- Continued rainfall throughout the year resulted in high forage production. At mid-October monitoring, increased production from 2004 figures is expected, which were 1500 lbs. of forage per acre based on leaving half for ground cover.