

## From Upper Feather River Watershed Farmers & Ranchers

The Dobbas Ranch of Sattley is located in Sierra Valley of Sierra County. The first parcel was purchased in 1989 from the Turner family. Later the Dargie, Barutti and Church parcels were added to the ranch. Jim believes that saving Sierra Valley ranch land is vital to preserving the heritage of the valley as well as ensuring the future quality of life in the valley.

The need for permanent inexpensive material to rebuild historic wooden weirs and bridges across the valley was evident to Jim. The family railroad contract business provided access to recycled gondola cars. After successfully replacing his first weir in 1991, other local ranchers have been supplied with over a dozen of these versatile cars to replace their deteriorating structures. This has contributed to the irrigation efficiency and water quality efforts of the entire valley.

The native mountain meadows of the Dargie and Barutti in the wetter side of the valley receive snowpack runoffs in the spring in addition to the Freeman Ditch constructed in 1868 which supplies water to the ranch. Developed conveyance ditches make it an easy ranch to irrigate and that is important as water-use efficiency and water quality become the focus in California agriculture.



### *Management Highlights*

- ◆ Convert 400 acres of marginal sage ground to productive dryland grain hay
- ◆ Increase yields of quality forage for on-ranch livestock feed and for sale
- ◆ Install solar powered stock-water systems to utilize feed in dryland areas



When Jim purchased the 300 acres of upland sage ground five miles to the North in Plumas County, he saw an opportunity to increase the productivity of that piece of ground with dryland hay crops. The first years were a learning experience. The unpredictable spring weather at 5000 ft leaves a small window for tillage and planting between 'too wet to plow' and 'too late to catch the rains'. Fall planting of winter grains has proven to be the least restricted by weather and field condition limitations. It takes the pressure off trying to out-guess the spring storms and risk missing the early moisture needed to ensure germination and optimum crop growth. With the recent purchase of a Wilcox cultivator, low-till farming is being practiced to reduce fuel and labor costs. Conversion to hay production has substantially increased forage quality and yields on this non-irrigated ground that could not previously be attained with sage and salt grass. The grain stubble is utilized for fall grazing following hay harvest.

# A Vision for Productivity

*"Farmers and Ranchers are the rational environmentalist. Our livelihood depends on caring for the land and water."*

With the growing emphasis on habitat enhancement, the Dobbas Ranch is adding habitat and conservation considerations to its overall ranch planning. A wetlands habitat is being planned. The developed wetland area will serve two purposes: provide waterfowl habitat enhancement, and it will serve as a tailwater buffer area to mitigate any potential water quality impacts of the irrigated meadows used for livestock grazing.

Mrs. Carol Dobbas serves as Executive Director of the local agriculture coalition for the Irrigated Lands Program. In an effort to better understand and influence the direction of this regulatory program, the coalition has joined with other ag-interest groups to advocate for recognition of the low-impact agricultural practices in the mountain valleys of northern California. "Area ranchers can benefit from the assistance of their agricultural organizations and local public representatives in these efforts."

Jim states: "It is important for our county, state and federal governments to realize the true importance of agriculture and not try to defeat it with over-regulation. It is vital that our country remain self-reliant, and let private business work." While agency partnerships have benefited some area ranchers, Jim has chosen to shy away from government assistance to maintain self-reliance.



## Future Plans

- ◆ Increase productivity and profitability of marginal non-irrigated areas of the ranch
- ◆ Utilize solar power as an alternative energy source for stock-water & irrigation systems
- ◆ Add habitat enhancement and conservation elements to the ranch management strategy
- ◆ Lobby private conservation partners to assist in preservation of Sierra Valley ranch lands & heritage



*The growing constraints of regulators will be the demise of many family farms.*

University of California Cooperative Extension (<http://ucanr.org/waterquality>)

Upper Feather River Watershed Group (<http://www.ufrwg.org>)

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