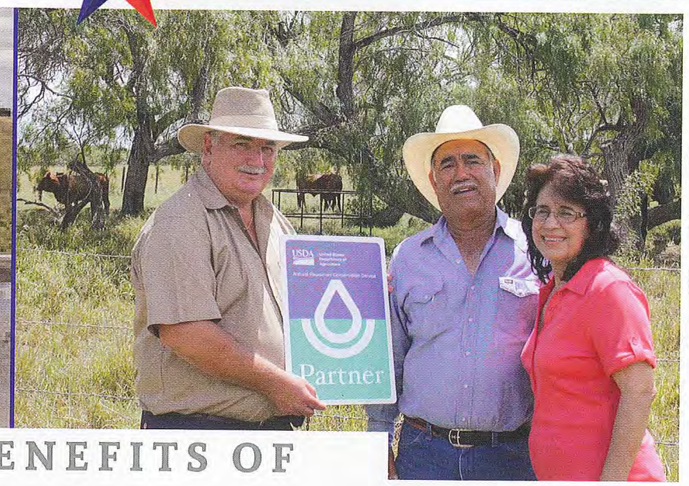

RANCH REAPS BENEFITS OF

CONSERVATION EFFORTS

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Driving through the Trejo Ranch, patches of green grass almost taller than the pickup puts a big smile on the faces of Jim Wells County ranchers, Arnold and Ida Trejo, who less than a year ago were destocking their cattle due to drought. Today the grassy fields and the stockpile of hay show the benefits of the Trejo's conservation efforts of resting the land along with keeping forage residue on the ground that helped absorb the timely rains.

Arnold Trejo developed a respect and love for livestock and ranching on his uncle's Duval County dairy farm as a young boy. He grew up in Alice where he worked in the oilfield, and where he has owned and operated a trucking business for many years. Ida, who grew up in Premont and moved to Freeport, considered herself a city girl, until she fell in love with the country boy she met on a blind date, and the country way of life.

"I grew up loving the work, it grew in my heart and I always knew one day I wanted to have my own ranch, cows, and tractors," said Arnold. "My wife said I was like a child filled with happiness when we acquired our ranch in Jim Wells County. Working on the ranch is really a great de-stressor for me and I just love it."

Although Trejo had experience with ranching with his uncle and his brother, he knew that there was a lot to learn to be successful on his operation. He was running about 174 head, which was way too many, as evidenced by the lack of grass on the ranch. He and his wife voluntarily sought out the resources and knowledge of the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and District Conservationist Bruce Healy to help them improve the condition of their land.

Working with Healy over the last 12 years, the Trejo's have developed a conservation plan designed to help meet their goals of improving and sustaining their ranch. Their plan included reducing herd numbers as well as manipulating distribution and frequency of grazing, cross fences, and a livestock watering system designed to facilitate cattle movement and distribution on their pastures. They also learned from Healy which financial assistance programs were offered through the NRCS that could help them meet their conservation goals for their ranch.

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In particular, it was the Environmental Quality Incentives Program's (EQIP) Strike Force Initiative that have assisted the Trejo's in implementing many of the conservation practices are essential to Trejo's ranching operation.

"Even though we sold the cattle for less than what we are buying them back now, what we would have lost in time, money in dealing with sick cattle, and future forage resources (being able to produce our own hay), more than makes up for the cost difference," said Arnold. "We know now after all we have learned that running the ranch the right way makes a big difference."

Arnold, who has served two years on the Jim Wells County Soil and Water Conservation District #355, and his wife have also been able to participate in local and national workshops that have helped them gain additional knowledge and drought survival techniques. Arnold says they are "common sense" practices that you don't think about until you hear it from other ranchers. The Trejo's have been able to implement these strategies as well as share their successes with their fellow ranchers, such as destocking not to overgraze their pastures during and after drought, and also concentrating on raising smaller livestock as they start re-stocking this year.

"The Trejo's actively seek our advice, listen and follow through with suggestions to help improve their land and its natural resources," said Healy. "They treat us as experts in the field and want us to visit and see what is being done in case there is a better way to implement new technology."

The Trejo's children, Arnold Jr. who is an engineer in Corpus Christi, Tammy who is a nurse in San Antonio and Selena, who is a beautician in Corpus Christi, along with her four-year-old son, Alex, enjoy coming to the ranch to hunt, fish and see the wildlife and cattle. Their parents have instilled a love of the land in their children and grandchildren, and hope they will continue the ranch and the family's land stewardship efforts for future generations.

"NRCS is something beautiful that government has done; it's a beautiful feeling knowing that someone has your back and gives a darn about you and your land, and not just because it's their job," said Arnold.

"Through our district conservationist... sharing, guiding, and opening our eyes to what can be done at the ranch, we have developed a respect and a friendship."