

CARES Recipient Profile



THIS FARM
CARES

Farm: Southwest Cattle Company

Location: Odessa, Florida- Hillsborough County

Date of Origination: 2010

Commodities: Brangus Cattle and Hay



One of the major blessings to farming and ranching is the abundance of wildlife that creates a home in the natural, serene areas throughout the property. It is no surprise to rancher, Kelly Fulford, that when she calls her Brangus cattle up to the truck each morning, local Whitetail deer and Osceola turkeys will also wander up. Fulford is the owner of Southwest Cattle Company in Odessa, Florida and considers herself blessed to have an active role in protecting it on a daily basis and shares how remarkable of an experience it is to witness daily an environment where animals living in their natural habitat safely interact with a full- time beef operation.

“To me, environmental stewardship and being a rancher is not a job if you go to work and love what you do every day.”

The daily operations of Fulford’s cattle ranch may seem typical but there is one exception. It is also a nature preserve. In partnership with Hillsborough County, Fulford leases the 2,000 acre property through the Environmental Lands Acquisition & Protection Program (ELAPP). In short, the general public is permitted to ride horses throughout the gorgeous nature preserve. As visitors trail ride, they are able to interact with the friendly cattle and can even enter parts of the land to which Fulford’s cattle are not permitted to impact. According to Hillsborough County’s Conservation and Environmental Lands Management Department, since 1987, the Jan K. Platt ELAPP has saved more than 61,000 acres of wildlife habitat. And allowing visitors to see these preserved landmasses in person is key to effective conservation education.

Fulford said, “In addition to being a good steward to my cattle, I am also a teacher to each of the visitors who ride through the property to inform them how ranching is a means to preserving the land and all it has to offer.”

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Through the utilization of Best Management Practices (BMPs) Fulford has been able to contribute to improving the water quality and soil's health throughout the ranch. BMPs are practical, cost-effective actions that agricultural producers take to conserve water and reduce the amount of pesticides, fertilizers, animal waste and other pollutants enter out water resources. They are designed to benefit water quality and water conservation while maintaining or even enhancing agricultural production.

"It's important to me to take care of water quality so that future generations, such as my grandchildren, and their children, can ranch on our land for decades to come," stated Fulford.

Through the use of rotational grazing with seven cross-fenced pastures, Fulford is able to offer fresh, tender grass to her Brangus cattle while allowing the vacant pastures time to regrow. Applying fertilizers using GPS-guided systems based on soil test results ensures Fulford only puts out supplemental nutrients exactly where and to what amount they are needed. In addition, supplemental feeding areas and mineral boxes are placed away from any nearby water sources.

Lint Jerrels, co-manager of Southwest Cattle Company, said, "Water quality is a huge concern to Kelly. I have seen her work to maintain ditches and cypress ponds to protect native grasses, the overall health of each field and the water bodies which run throughout."

Fulford received the *This Farm CARES* designation by Florida Farm Bureau Federation in 2016. CARES is an acronym which stands for County Alliance for Responsible Environmental Stewardship and is a program that started in 2001 to publicly recognize farmers and ranchers who voluntarily implement BMPs on their farms. The CARES Program also promotes those practices which prove to be economically viable and environmentally sound. Through the successful implementation of BMPs, Florida's farmers and ranchers show a sincere commitment to the protection and preservation of our natural resources for generations to come. Fulford is an outstanding representative of the CARES Program and be sure to check out the highlight video made about her operation as featured on www.thisfarmcares.org and also on the This Farm CARES Facebook page.