State of Wisconsin
Governor Scott Walker

Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection

Ben Brancel, Secretary

DATE: November 1, 2012

TO: Board of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection

FROM: Ben Brancel, Secretary
Jeff Lyon, Deputy Secretary

SUBJECT: Leopold Conservation Award

PRESENTED BY: Ben Brancel, Secretary

RECOMMENDATION: This is for informational purposes only. No Board action is required.

SUMMARY / BACKGROUND:

Four Wisconsin farm families are finalists to receive the third Leopold Conservation Award from the Sand County Foundation and Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation. The winner will be announced on November 14 in Madison at the meeting of the citizen board for the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection.

A special presentation for the winner and finalists will take place December 2 at the WFBF Annual Meeting in Wisconsin Dells. The winner receives a $10,000 award and a Leopold crystal.

The first two recipients of the Leopold Conservation Award under the Sand County Foundation and Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation partnership were the Bragger family from Independence in Buffalo County, and the Koepke family from Oconomowoc in Waukesha County.

ABOUT THE LEOPOLD CONSERVATION AWARD
The Leopold Conservation Award is a competitive award that recognizes landowner achievement in voluntary conservation. In 2012, Sand County Foundation will also present Leopold Conservation Awards in California, Colorado, Nebraska, South Dakota, Texas, Utah and Wyoming.

The Leopold Conservation Award in Wisconsin is made possible through the generous support of the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, American Transmission Company (ATC), Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation, Rural Mutual Insurance Company and Farm Credit.

Jim and Valerie Hebbe, Princeton (Green Lake County)
Jim Hebbe has been implementing conservation practices for 26 years and has shared his ideas with other farmers as the Green Lake County Conservationist since 1984. He and his wife, Valerie, raise 1,100 acres of corn, soybeans, wheat and alfalfa in central Wisconsin. In addition to no-till planting all of the crops, he has worked to develop numerous conservation systems that complement each other and lead to less erosion and more residue cover on the land. The farm includes land with a significant slope draining into a Class 1 Trout Stream. A water and sediment basin was constructed to help control and reduce field runoff into the stream. Native prairie grasses were planted in a field that borders the creek. Twenty-five acres of evergreen trees were planted on a farm with light and sandy soil. In 1985 he helped develop conservation standards for the Farmland Preservation Program participants to control soil erosion to sustainable levels.

Justin and Lynn Isherwood, Plover (Portage County)
Justin and Lynn Isherwood's 157-year-old farm consists of 1,500 acres, including 260 acres of woodland. They specialize in the production of vegetables, primarily potatoes and grain. For the Isherwoods, an "ethic of landedness" is at the heart of their agricultural operation. Justin played a prominent role in the development of *Healthy Grown* potatoes, which demand a higher level of environmental quality production standards and require enrolled farmers to commit to ecological enhancement of their non-production lands. The Isherwoods' farm includes four miles of stream edge, so Justin and Lynn are committed to water management to enhance wildlife habitat and strive to make water quality a community-wide discussion through the development of a booklet that gives voice to water issues from farmers, other landowners and elected officials. As an accomplished writer and farmer, Justin is dedicated to making "agriculture visible to a population ever more distant from agriculture."

Steve and Patricia Kling, Taylor (Jackson County)
The Klings describe their conservation ethic as a "hybrid farming system." They began utilizing a managed intensive grazing system on their dairy farm in 1993. It has allowed them to maintain the size of their closed dairy herd while reducing input costs. They say the 65 acres of pasture produces more today than when it was strip cropped. With grazing, the cows harvest every inch of those acres. The pastures have not been tilled in 19 years, but seem more productive today. The Klings believe that rotating crops and minimal tillage have been useful in their cropping fields. They adopted a 590 nutrient management plan and use minimal amounts of chemicals when spraying for weeds. They conduct soil tests for each field and apply fertilizer and lime accordingly. The couple has been active with the Jackson County Farm Bureau, Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board, 4-H, Jackson county Dairy Promotion Committee, Dairy Farmers of America and the Jackson County Dairy Herd Improvement Association.

Mark Riechers, Darlington (Lafayette County)
Mark and his son, Joe Riechers, produce beef, corn and soybeans on a farm located at the southern end of the driftless region in southwestern Wisconsin. The family's approach to land and resource management is based on the recognition that soil does not need to be tilled to be productive. Their no-till planting system significantly reduces investments in energy and labor. Corn and soybean crops are grown on less than a gallon of fuel per acre each year. Grassed waterways and terraces are combined with careful residue management and cross-slope planting, which help keep the farm's soils in place and run-off very low and clean. Off the farm, Mark Riechers has been a leader in the agricultural community, communicating about conservation and agriculture at various conferences and in several publications.

ABOUT SAND COUNTY FOUNDATION
Sand County Foundation (www.sandcounty.net) is a private, non-profit conservation group based in Madison, dedicated to working with private landowners to improve habitat on their land. Sand County's mission is to advance the use of ethical and scientifically sound land management practices and partnerships for the benefit of people and their rural landscapes. Sand County Foundation works with private landowners because the majority of the nation's fish, wildlife and natural resources are found on private lands. The organization backs local champions, invests in civil society and places incentives before regulation to create solutions that endure and grow. The organization encourages the exercise of private responsibility in the pursuit of improved land health as an essential alternative to many of the commonly used strategies in modern conservation.