

NRDC Announces Four Winners of the 2010 “Growing Green Awards”

Awards recognize leaders and innovators in the field of sustainable food

San Francisco, CA (April 13, 2009)

In anticipation of Earth Day, four [winners](#) of the second annual [Growing Green Awards](#) were announced today by the Natural Resources Defense Council. The 2010 winners are:

Food Producer: Russ Lester of Dixon Ridge Farms, who is also the recipient of a \$10,000 cash prize for his achievements in sustainable food production

Water Steward (new category**):** Mike Benziger of Benziger Family Winery

Thought Leader: Fred Kirschenmann of Stone Barns Center for Food and Agriculture

Business Leader: Karl Kupers of Shepherd’s Grain

“These innovators are saving energy, nurturing soils, reducing water use and showing all of us how to produce food in harmony with the environment,” said Jonathan Kaplan, Director of the Sustainable Agriculture Project at NRDC. “The impact of their leadership goes far beyond their farms, inspiring consumers, growers, policy-makers and entrepreneurs.”

An independent panel of prestigious sustainable food experts selected the four winners from a pool of 170 impressive candidates that included diverse growers, entrepreneurs and business leaders across the country.

Food Producer winner Russ Lester is co-owner of Dixon Ridge Farms, the largest U.S. handler of organic walnuts. Located in Winters, CA, Dixon Ridge has dramatically slashed its environmental impacts, with the goal of becoming [100% energy self-sufficient](#) by 2012. Dixon Ridge walnuts are grown without harmful chemicals, amid carefully selected cover crops and irrigation systems that minimize the need for tillage and reduce global warming pollution. Lester converts walnut shells into energy that is used to power other stages of walnut processing.

“At Dixon Ridge Farms, we’ve been improving our sustainable farming practices for the past 30 years and changing consumer perceptions of organic walnuts along the way,” said Lester. “With our goal to be energy neutral, we plan to reduce our impact on the environment even more. I’m honored to be recognized by NRDC and such a distinguished panel of judges.”

Mike Benziger, founder of Benziger Family Winery in Glen Ellen, CA, won in the new *Water Steward* category for his industry-leading methods of water use reduction and water recycling. With an innovative constructed wetland and pond treatment system, Benziger Winery recycles an average of [2 million gallons of water per year](#). The winery significantly decreases water inputs using new grape sorting technologies, water sensors and cover crops that reduce runoff.

“At Benziger Winery, we consider water conservation a major priority in planning vineyards, growing grapes and making wine, and we’ve seen the quality of our grapes and wines increase noticeably,” said Benziger. “It’s good for the environment and the wine. My family and I are honored to receive the Water Stewardship Award from NRDC.”

Thought Leader winner Fred Kirschenmann has inspired sustainable food advocates, researchers and policymakers for over three decades with his writing and leadership. Kirschenmann serves as the

President of the Board of Directors for the Stone Barns Center for Food and Agriculture, a nonprofit that operates as a sustainable farm, kitchen and teaching campus for nearby New York City residents. Kirschenmann is a professor at Iowa State University and third-generation farmer, teaching others the importance of [local food systems](#) that work in harmony with nature and human health.

“Stone Barns has put together a food system that restores the biological health of the land, while producing delicious, healthy food. We are helping urban residents become new “food citizens” who will shape the food system of the future,” said Kirschenmann. “The privilege of receiving this award makes me even more dedicated to working to bring about the food revolution we need.”

Karl Kupers, winner in the *Business Leader* category, is co-founder of Shepherd’s Grain, which reconnects 33 growers in the Pacific Northwest to local markets through the sale of [sustainably farmed wheat](#). Based out of Harrington, WA, Shepherd’s Grain sources from suppliers that use no-tillage growing methods, preserving their soils from erosion and likely reducing global warming pollution. With a pioneering pricing model, Shepherd’s Grain empowers growers to profit from higher levels of environmental stewardship.

“Winning the NRDC Growing Green Business Leader award is very special, as it recognizes how a business can successfully use the marketplace to build support for and reward better stewardship,” said Kupers. “Shepherd’s Grain is creating relationships between producers and consumers, allowing a value chain to be developed that can truly be called sustainable. I am honored to receive this award from NRDC.”

The *Growing Green Awards* judging panel was chaired by Susan Clark, Executive Director of the Columbia Foundation, and included A.G. Kawamura, California Secretary of Agriculture, Michael Pollan, *New York Times* best-selling author of *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*, and Nora Pouillon, chef and founder of Restaurant Nora, the nation’s first certified organic restaurant.

The [Winners](#) will be honored by Michael Pollan, Eric Schlosser, author of *Fast Food Nation*, and Gary Hirshberg, CEO of Stonyfield Farms, at NRDC’s 2010 benefit, “*From Water to Farm to You*.” The event will take place at Yoshi’s Restaurant and Jazz Club in San Francisco on April 29.

See NRDC’s [Eat Green fact sheet](#) and [Simple Steps](#) page about making food choices that are healthier for you and the environment.

Read blogs by judges Nora Pouillon and Susan Clark in NRDC’s [Greenlight](#). Winners’ blogs will be posted in the coming days.

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The Natural Resources Defense Council is a U.S.-based nonprofit organization of scientists, lawyers and environmental specialists dedicated to protecting public health and the environment. Founded in 1970, NRDC has 1.3 million members and online activists, served from offices in New York, Washington, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Livingston, MT, and Beijing. Visit <http://www.nrdc.org>.