

Central Valley Producer Profile

MONTNA FAMILY FROM YUBA CITY, CALIFORNIA



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– Al Montna

The Montna Family

Ducks and rice have been inextricably linked since long before the first settlers laid eyes on the Sacramento Valley. As far as Al Montna is concerned, that bond will remain strong for generations to come.

"Profit, people, and planet have always been the backbone of our farming ethic," Al said. "You have to look at the whole: run a sound business, and you can do conservation and help people."

Al has been involved with Ducks Unlimited since the 1960s. "I've been hunting my entire life, particularly waterfowl, so supporting DU just seemed natural," he explained. After college, building his farming business took him away from the organization, but in the 1980s, DU biologists got him involved again with the Rice Roller project. "It all started with the Rice Roller," Al recalled. "Rolling the stubble let us stop the annual burning."

An end to burning meant important food and habitat were left for the thousands of migrating waterfowl that visit California's Central Valley each year. "Water, rolling, and ducks help us clear the field for next year's production," Al explained. "We see waterfowl as a partner, so a change in our farming practices that benefits them also benefits us."

Rice is a major food source for people, waterfowl, and other wildlife, and Al doesn't want to see us lose another acre. His strong belief in the connections between farming, the people it feeds, and the opportunities it presents to improve habitat for waterfowl is what got him involved in creating the USA Rice-DU Stewardship Partnership, on which he still serves as co-chair.

"The partnership we've formed is one that will benefit waterfowl and other wildlife, rice producers, hunters and American citizens alike," Al said. "We'll work together and build upon our common interests and challenges to sustain waterfowl and rice production on the landscape."

Al's influence on the next generation of rice growers is apparent in his daughters, Nicole Montna Van Vleck and Michelle Montna Vogt, who are involved on the farm and with legislative groups for rice and water. Nicole caught the hunting bug and, along with her children, Christian and Tori, heads afield with Al each year. Nicole and Michelle believe, as their father does, that if you "maintain production, you will maintain the birds."

Today, Nicole is the president and CEO of Montna Farms. She serves on the board of

the American Commodity Company and the California Rice Commission (CRC). She has been a director at CRC since 2000 and chair of the California Rice Producers Committee for the last four years. Over the course of her life, Nicole has seen two things grow in importance for rice producers – water and communicating their story.

As a board member of the Northern California Water Association and chair of their communication committee, Nicole volunteers countless hours maintaining northern California's water rights and advancing solutions to the state's water needs for agriculture, communities and the environment. She also serves as an officer for two local water districts and sits on the USA Rice Farmers board.

Nicole understands the vital role that telling the story of working ricelands plays in ensuring its future. As such, she has been an active member in the CRC's communications committee, blogging and participating in videos to enhance the public's understanding of rice farming and connected resources, such as waterfowl and other wetland dependent wildlife.

“Rice agriculture has a unique story to tell. Our working wetlands provide more wildlife habitat than any other commodity crop and play an important role in the water cycle,” Nicole said. “People have to understand what we do, not only for the people we feed, but also for the waterfowl and other wildlife we support.”



