

## Stockman, Tina

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**From:** Soil & Water Conservation Program  
**Sent:** Tuesday, November 21, 2023 8:12 AM  
**To:** Soil & Water Conservation Program; DNR.Soil and Water Conservation Districts staff  
**Cc:** DNR.MGS SWC Staff  
**Subject:** Cope Grass Farm Receives 2023 Missouri Leopold Conservation Award

Good morning,

Please see the announcement below on the 2023 Leopold Award winner. Harry Cope is a former board member in Montgomery County. Congratulations to Harry and his family.

Soil & Water Conservation Program  
Phone 573-751-4932

We'd like your feedback on the service you received from the Missouri Department of Natural Resources. Please consider taking a few minutes to complete the department's Customer Satisfaction Survey at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/MoDNRsurvey>. Thank you.

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**From:** Missouri Farmers Care Foundation <[info@mofarmerscare.com](mailto:info@mofarmerscare.com)>  
**Sent:** Friday, November 17, 2023 2:43 PM  
**To:** DNR.Communications <[communications@dnr.mo.gov](mailto:communications@dnr.mo.gov)>  
**Subject:** Cope Grass Farm Receives 2023 Missouri Leopold Conservation Award



***For Immediate Release***

November 17, 2023

[Website Link](#)

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Sand County Foundation

## ***Cope Grass Farm Receives 2023 Missouri Leopold Conservation Award***

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Cope Grass Farm of Truxton, located in Montgomery County, Mo., has been selected as the recipient of the 2023 Missouri Leopold Conservation Award®. The award honors farmers, ranchers and forestland owners who go above and beyond to manage soil health, water quality and wildlife habitat on working land.

“In agriculture, our greatest resource is the land, and as farmers, it is our duty to be good stewards of that land for future generations,” said Aaron Porter, chairman of the Missouri Soybean Merchandising Council. “Sustainability is one of the top priorities for our organization, and it’s outstanding to see the spotlight on farm families who are truly living the example of stewardship.”

Sand County Foundation and national sponsor American Farmland Trust present the Leopold Conservation Award to private landowners in 27 states. In [Missouri](#), the award is presented with the [Missouri Farmers Care Foundation](#), [Missouri Corn Merchandising Council](#), [Missouri Soybean Merchandising Council](#) and [USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service](#).

“The Missouri Corn Merchandising Council congratulates Cope Grass Farm for being awarded the 2023 Leopold Conservation Award,” says MCMC Chairman Matt Lambert, a corn farmer from Laclede, Mo., and previous Leopold Conservation Award recipient. “The Cope family are proven thought leaders. The research and hard work they’ve done has proven what works best for their family’s operation while improving soil health and conservation methods. We value the role this award has in highlighting the state’s farmers and hope it inspires others to continue making positive advancements for the next generation.”

Given in honor of conservationist Aldo Leopold, the award recognizes landowners whose dedication to environmental improvement inspires others. In his influential 1949 book, *A Sand County Almanac*, Leopold advocated for “a land ethic,” an ethical relationship between people and the land they own and manage.

“Leopold Conservation Award recipients are examples of how Aldo Leopold’s land ethic is alive and well today,” said Kevin McAleese, Sand County Foundation President and CEO. “Their dedication to conservation shows how individuals can improve the health of the land while producing food and fiber.”

Harry Cope and his family received the award during the Missouri Governor’s Conference on Agriculture in Osage Beach on Nov. 17.

“Harry is an innovative farmer and rancher who is willing to share his conservation story with neighbors, agency staff, or any group wanting to learn more about the Cope Grass Farm operation,” said Ashley Johnson, NRCS Missouri Acting State Conservationist. “Whether it is the diversity of conservation practices applied, seed mixes

for cover crops and forage plantings, or his pioneering resource management, Harry strives to promote soil health, manage diverse native warm- and cool-season forages, and improve wildlife habitat on all acres of his farm.”

An independent panel of agriculture and conservation leaders reviewed the applications for the award, which comes with a \$10,000 cash prize.

“As the national sponsor for Sand County Foundation’s Leopold Conservation Award, American Farmland Trust celebrates the hard work and dedication of the Cope family,” said John Piotti, AFT President and Chief Executive Officer. “At AFT, we believe that conservation in agriculture requires a focus on the land, the practices and the people and this award recognizes the integral role of all three.”

#### [ABOUT COPE GRASS FARM](#)

Cope Grass Farm was established in 1990 with a focus on rotational grazing cattle, sheep and hogs. Today, it’s a partnership between Harry and his daughter Sabrina Cope who heads up marketing for the farm.

A recent audit by the National Audubon Society documented more than 100 species of birds at Cope Grass Farm, one of just seven Missouri farms to receive Audubon’s “Bird Friendly Beef” certification. The audit showed a 30 percent increase in bird species in just three years, including the Henslow’s Sparrow, a species in population decline. Harry Cope sees this as a reflection of his stewardship philosophy and the farm’s ecological health.

During the farm’s evolution, Harry planted some 350 acres of pastureland with a mix of native grasses and forbs. Today, innovative grazing practices coupled with deep-rooted vegetation keep pastures lush, even during drought. That diversity of plant life might include what others would call weeds, but in light of his goals, Harry knows that the diverse mix of forbs brings pollinators, wildlife, and biodiversity—including the Monarch butterflies that are drawn to the farm’s multiple species of milkweed.

Aside from his focus on perennial forage, the Copes graze livestock on milo and cover crops. Grazing standing milo during winter reduces need for hay and cuts labor and equipment costs. Plus, as one of the principles of soil health, incorporating livestock into cropland benefits both the animal and the next crop.

The Copes use another innovative alternative to growing hay—micro-greens. This nutritious approach uses barley seeds placed in six-foot trays and watered for three minutes every hour. After six days, the tray looks like vibrant green turf. Loaded with minerals, sugars, and carbohydrates, the cattle love it.

To address the potential for soil erosion on the rolling farm, the Copes build terraces and grassed waterways, and they use cover crops and no-till practices. Cover crops include sunflowers, turnips, buckwheat, oats, and barley, all of which help improve the soil’s ability to cycle nutrients and infiltrate water.

The health and vitality of the 500 acres of woodlands at Cope Grass Farm is also important to Harry and his family. In the fall, oak trees drop acorns that turn into to a feed source for pigs. Grazing pigs are fitted with nose rings that discourage them from rooting, which would damage the forest floor, but still allow them to forage freely. The Copes employ rotational grazing in the woods to maximize the natural feed source and control the time the pigs are in one spot. Meanwhile, the family thins out certain trees with the help of a certified forester to improve the timber stand and create better habitat for wildlife and bats.

On the farm ground he rents, Harry maintains close relationships with landlords by showing them how conservation practices benefit their land. When margins narrowed for beef producers, Harry and Sabrina decided to sell beef directly to consumers to help the public understand how food is raised. He says this type of interaction is how people will come to understand that cattle can thrive in the same fields as quail, meadowlarks, and the Henslow's Sparrow.

Aside from perfecting practices on his farm, Harry consults with young and beginning farmers on how to manage their grazing systems. He has hosted several field days to promote grazing and is a member of the Missouri Forage and Grassland Council Board. In fact, as a highly effective communicator and educator, Harry is considered by some to be one of Missouri's best conservation ambassadors. His uncommon ability to engage people from all walks of life allows him to show others how agriculture and conservation can be compatible.

The Leopold Conservation Award Program in Missouri is made possible thanks to the generous support of American Farmland Trust, Missouri Farmers Care Foundation, Missouri Corn Merchandising Council, Missouri Soybean Association, Missouri Soybean Merchandising Council, Sand County Foundation, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, FCS Financial, MFA, Inc., Missouri Cattlemen's Association, Missouri Fertilizer Control Board, Missouri Department of Conservation, Missouri Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Missouri Soil and Water Conservation Program, Missouri's Electric Cooperatives, The Nature Conservancy in Missouri, and McDonald's.

For more information on the award, visit [www.leopoldconservationaward.org](http://www.leopoldconservationaward.org).

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Photo Caption: Cope Grass Farm was joined by partners as they were announced as the 2023 Missouri Leopold Conservation Award recipient on November 17 during the Missouri Governor's Conference on Agriculture in Osage Beach. In Missouri, the award is presented annually by [Sand County Foundation](#), [American Farmland Trust](#), [Missouri Farmers Care Foundation](#), [Missouri Soybean Association and Missouri Soybean Merchandising Council](#), [Missouri Corn Merchandising Council](#), USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, and numerous agriculture and conservation partners.



### **LEOPOLD CONSERVATION AWARD**

The Leopold Conservation Award is a competitive award that recognizes landowner achievement in voluntary conservation. Sand County Foundation presents the award in California, Colorado, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Wisconsin, and in New England (Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont). [www.leopoldconservationaward.org](http://www.leopoldconservationaward.org)

### **AMERICAN FARMLAND TRUST**

American Farmland Trust is the only national organization that takes a holistic approach to agriculture, focusing on the land itself, the agricultural practices used on that land, and the farmers and ranchers who do the work. AFT launched the conservation agriculture movement and continues to raise public awareness through its No Farms, No Food message. Since its founding in 1980, AFT has helped permanently protect over 6.8 million acres of agricultural lands, advanced environmentally sound farming practices on millions of additional acres, and supported thousands of farm families. [www.farmland.org](http://www.farmland.org)

### **MISSOURI CORN MERCHANDISING COUNCIL**

The Missouri Corn Merchandising Council (MCMC) is an organization of corn growers dedicated to the profitability of corn production by investing checkoff dollars to facilitate communication with growers and customers, explore new research opportunities, and expand corn utilization in local, state, national, and global markets. [www.mocorn.org](http://www.mocorn.org)

### **MISSOURI FARMERS CARE FOUNDATION**

Missouri Farmers Care Foundation enables Missourians to understand the influence and importance of agriculture in their daily lives by serving as the centralized hub of the unified educational programs, awards, and hunger relief efforts of Missouri's agricultural community. [www.MOFarmersCare.com](http://www.MOFarmersCare.com)

### **MISSOURI SOYBEAN MERCHANDISING COUNCIL**

The Missouri Soybean Merchandising Council is a statewide, farmer-led organization working to improve opportunities for Missouri soybean farmers through a combination of research, outreach, education and market development efforts through the soybean checkoff. [www.mosoy.org](http://www.mosoy.org)

**SAND COUNTY FOUNDATION**

Sand County Foundation inspires and empowers a growing number of private landowners to ethically manage natural resources in their care, so future generations have clean and abundant water, healthy soil to support agriculture and forestry, plentiful habitat for wildlife and opportunities for outdoor recreation. [www.sandcountyfoundation.org](http://www.sandcountyfoundation.org)

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Visit our website at [www.mofarmerscare.com](http://www.mofarmerscare.com).

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