

# California ranch family living history

By **JULIA HOLLISTER**  
For the Capital Press



Tom Orvis

Tom Orvis and his family's story goes back five generations.

"The Snow Ranch was formed in 1873, after William Snow completed approximately 15 years of putting the properties together," Orvis said.

The land is a 5,000-acre block in both Stanislaus and Calaveras counties. Snow's daughter, Mary Ada, met C.B. Orvis, a veterinarian from Wisconsin, in the 1890s when he came from Stockton in a surrey to doctor a horse, he said. "They married soon after."

Their son, William Snow Orvis, was born in 1896. At that time, they raised sheep and cattle. The registered Hereford herd was established

in 1918.

Today the Snow Ranch is headquartered near Farmington, Calif.

The ranch raises registered Horned and Polled Herefords and commercial Black Baldie crossbreds. The herd includes 200 mother cows and 140 replacement heifers, he said.

The operation calves in fall and spring and takes cattle to Bloods Meadow in Bear Valley in the summer.

They also operate Orvis Ranch Beef — a grass-fed beef purveyor.

They use herd bulls and artificial insemination to manage their genetic base. They also lease part of the ranch to Diestel Turkey Ranch for turkey production.

The operation sells weaning bulls to customers for breeding and maintains the registered herd through the female line and home-grown herd bulls. They also sell turkey manure to growers.

The days are long, Tom Orvis said. The work — repairing fences, working cattle, calving — starts at daylight and often goes into dark.

In spite of the hours, he would encourage anyone to go into ranching with one warning: "If you don't love it, don't do it."

"The constant threat of drought tops the list of challenges that face California livestock industry," he said. "Rules and regulations complete the list. They seem useless and time-consuming and have fees attached that never, in my opinion, seem to accomplish anything."



Courtesy of Tom Orvis

Tom Orvis and his family raise registered Horned and Polled Herefords in Stanislaus and Calaveras counties, Calif. "If you don't love ranching, don't do it," he says.

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