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## “Gem of the Valley” Conserved

ARVADA, Colo. (Jan. 9, 2017) –The Colorado Cattlemen’s Agricultural Land Trust (CCALT) has partnered with Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to conserve the historic OxCart Ranch located on the upper end of the San Luis Valley. The conservation easement will conserve approximately 442 acres of the Oliver-Meyer family owned OxCart Ranch.

The OxCart Ranch was first homesteaded by German immigrants, Cleopatra Hice and her brothers, in the mid-1800s. As European landowners, the Hice family had a particular interest in water rights and according to family lore, Cleopatra rode through Indian territory to Santa Fe to file the ranch’s first water rights before Colorado was even considered a state. To this day, Cleopatra’s efforts and the significance of those senior water rights have enabled the Oxcart Ranch to flourish. Even in some of the San Luis Valley’s driest times, the ranch has been described as the “Gem of the Valley.”

In 1959, parents of the current owner, Melanie Meyer bought the ranch and moved into the historic Hice cabin built by Cleopatra and her brothers. Today, Melanie and her husband Galen are the fourth generation to own and operate the ranch, which they use to run a cow/calf operation.

“Our family has a strong conviction to ensure that the ranch is protected from development and to guarantee its agricultural viability for future generations. We are extremely grateful to CCALT, NRCS and GOCO for their help in assuring the long-term conservation of the ranch,” said Melanie.

“The OxCart Ranch is part of a significant conservation effort by GOCO, CCALT, and ranchers of the San Luis Valley to permanently protect everything this area has to offer,” said GOCO Executive Director Chris Castilian. “GOCO is proud to be a part of conserving the OxCart Ranch, and other ranches like it, as we work together to conserve the best of Colorado for future generations.”

“The San Luis Valley is home to some of Colorado’s oldest agricultural history, and the OxCart Ranch is no exception. CCALT is happy to partner with the Oliver-Meyer family to conserve both their agricultural operation, and rich ranching heritage. This property will add to the more than 24,000 acres of land previously conserved by CCALT in Saguache County and southern Chaffee County and we are happy to see this piece of the Valley conserved forever,” said Courtney Bennett, CCALT Conservation Manager.

“NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to help agricultural producers and others care for the land,” said Clint Evans, USDA NRCS State Conservationist in Colorado. “Conserving prime agricultural landscapes is one of our top priorities and our Agricultural Conservation Easement Program helps to achieve that goal. It helps conserve agricultural lands and wetlands and their related benefits while limiting non-agricultural uses of the land.”

As growth, development, or shifts in landscapes change, CCALT and the Oliver-Meyer family are pleased to know that the “Gem of the Valley” will remain intact and untouched, just as it was when Cleopatra Hice and her brothers first explored this land in the 1800s.

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*Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust* conserves Colorado's western heritage and working landscapes for the benefit of future generations. For more information visit [www.ccalt.org](http://www.ccalt.org).

*Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO)* invests a portion of Colorado Lottery proceeds to help preserve and enhance the state's parks, trails, wildlife, rivers, and open spaces. GOCO's independent board awards competitive grants to local governments and land trusts, and makes investments through Colorado Parks and Wildlife. Created when voters approved a Constitutional Amendment in 1992, GOCO has since funded more than 5,000 projects in urban and rural areas in all 64 counties without any tax dollar support. Visit [www.GOCO.org](http://www.GOCO.org) for more information.

*The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)* is the primary federal agency that works with private landowners to help them conserve, maintain and improve their natural resources. The Agency emphasizes voluntary, science-based conservation; technical assistance; partnerships; incentive-based programs; and cooperative problem solving at the community level.