

**Comments by Elaine Spencer**  
**Presentation of the 2003 Spencer Award for Sustainable Agriculture to**  
**David, Diane and Dresden Petty**  
**August 9, 2003**

Our family is delighted to be part of awarding the 2003 Spencer Award for Sustainable Agriculture to the Petty family.

This award seeks to advance two things that were life-long commitments of our parents.

The first is Iowa State University. Our parents believed that as one of the oldest land grant universities in the nation, its mission was not only to educate young people, but also through its research, education and extension to make a major difference in the lives of Iowans. The Leopold Center, by focusing its efforts on the preservation of sustainable agriculture and the family farm, carries out the fullest realization of that mission.

The second was their personal commitment to sustainable agriculture and the family farm. My parents believed that family farmers were the best possible foundation for decent, reliable communities, which formed the building blocks of a decent, enlightened greater society. Sustaining the viability of family farming was a passion for my father particularly.

He believed something else, however, of equal importance. That was that the land he farmed, as had his father and grandfather before him, did not "belong" to him. It belonged to all people of all time, and he was but its steward for his generation. He believed that it was each farmer's obligation to leave his land more productive than he found it, so that the land could continue to serve the needs of each succeeding generation. That mirrors the teachings of Aldo Leopold, for whom the Leopold Center is named, and is the essence of what "sustainable agriculture" means.

The Petty family's work has epitomized that belief. They stand as an example that family farms can remain financially successful, while at the same time exercising the most enlightened stewardship. Bob and I, and our families join the Leopold Center and Governor Vilsack in congratulating them on their receipt of this award.