

# Farmers' Forum

Farm Section

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Fargo-Moorhead

## Ranch one of top 5 horse farms in US

By Helmut Schmidt  
hschmidt@forumcomm.com

Sheldon, N.D.

**D**ave and Kim Utke have spent 43 years quietly building an international reputation for breeding champion appaloosa horses.

Now, their Sheldak Ranch has been proclaimed a champion in its own right.

The 1,000-acre ranch was recently named one of the top five horse farms in the U.S. by Horseman Magazine.

Kim and her husband, Dave, started the ranch in 1968 with one stallion.

The honor is a reminder that even though they've had to put in a lot of work, they've had a good ride.

"Being tied down all year with the operation, it took something like that to make us realize what we have accomplished," Kim Utke said.

The Utkes, both 69, run the operation themselves, she said. They have no hired hands to run the spread, located about 50 miles southwest of Fargo and five miles east of Sheldon.

Since 1968, they've bred appaloosas for their disposition, intelligence, versatility, and unique and beautiful color patterns.

"The breed has a true desire to please the rider/handler, which makes it a joy to train, ride and work with," she said.

"I had decided to (start a ranch) years earlier when I got my first horse" as a sixth-grader growing up in the Detroit Lakes, Minn., area, Utke said.

Dave was born and raised on a farm on the north end of Broadway in Fargo, she said, so it was a natural transition for him.

With the backing of an understanding banker, they

### Online

► For more on the Sheldak Ranch and the history of their champion breeding lines, go to [www.sheldakranch.com](http://www.sheldakranch.com).



Duane Steedsman / Special to The Forum

**Dave and Kim Utke**, owners of the Sheldak Ranch near Sheldon, appear in a photo taken in 2006 in Fargo for a Mills Fleet Farm publication.

bought an expensive stallion named Mighty Tim, she said.

Over time, Mighty Tim and his offspring won hundreds of awards in halter and many riding competitions, she said. Tim alone won nine major titles in various events in the U.S., Utke said.

She easily rattles off the names of the great stallions that followed and became the foundation of their breeding program, including Spitting Image, King David and Crystal Prince.

Their current stallions are Imagine, Awestruck, Master in Command and Ima Cool Kelo.



Kim Utke / Special to The Forum

**Sheldak Ranch mare The Crime Seen** is pictured in a pasture with her filly CSI.

Utke said they sell about 30 foals a year, with some fillies retained for their breeding program.

They don't stand their stallions to mares outside of their breeding pool.

Most of their sales, 63 percent over the past three years, are

outside the U.S., particularly in Mexico. About 10 percent of their sales have been in North Dakota, with the remaining 27 percent elsewhere in the U.S., Utke said.

The buyers come from Panama, Australia, Canada, Sweden, Germany, Spain, South

Africa, Venezuela, Belgium, Ecuador and Chile.

"As soon as current-year foals are put up on the Sheldak Ranch website, the first to respond are from out of the country," Utke said.

Readers can reach Forum reporter Helmut Schmidt at (701) 241-5583



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