

The 880-acre Sheldak Ranch run by **Dave and Kim Utke** sprawls across the southeastern part of North Dakota, a scant 20 miles from the Minnesota border. This flat country, with slightly rolling hills, is reputed to be the hottest in the nation in summer and coldest in winter. ❖ It's here in a legendary "tough but true" environment where Dave and Kim Utke have built their reputation as one of the best Appaloosa breeders in the nation. ❖ They began in 1968 with an Appaloosa stallion named Rebel Redhawk — one horse and a dream. Today, their impressive list of horses reflects a dedication to the Appaloosa breed that includes the distinction of making their living solely on breeding and selling Appaloosas. ❖ Depending on the time of the year, the breeding operation averages approximately 50 mares. With the sale of some as bred mares, they produce approximately 40 to 50 foals a year and may keep several fillies each year. ❖ Kim Utke remembers when that first Appaloosa stallion stepped foot on their ranch. "People had been showing that horse and had boarded it with us. It was the first Appaloosa we had seen," she says. "It had better quality than any horse we had seen up to that time. We just fell in love with anything and everything about him, his color, his disposition, everything." ❖ From the beginning the Utkes have been setting goals and making them all, all based on one concept — to raise the best Appaloosas in the country. They chose Appaloosas years ago for their disposition, versatility, conformation and unique markings. But an operation located so far off the beaten path that you can hardly see the path has meant a lot of sacrifice. ❖ To say that raising Appaloosas has been the Utkes life is no small understatement. There has been little time to do anything else. With keeping up a ranch and caring for their horses, they very rarely get away. But the rewards are there for everyone to see. ❖ They market their horses not only through *Appaloosa Journal* ads, but also have their own mailing list of 300 to 350 people on file and publish a list of current year babies and bred mares which leads to repeat customers year after year. ❖ Kim Utke explains that as only a part of their success. "We raise these horses right from the beginning. People come see them in the raw, in pasture condition, and are amazed at their condition. They're naturally that way," she says. ❖ After a pause to really think about why, she adds another thought. "All you have to do is walk out in our pasture and see these horses. Do that and you'll know why we love the Appaloosa."

