

WINTER 2021

texas neighbors



Matt and Jessica Hanslik
grow the family farm



Common questions about agriculture



By **Russell Boening**
President
Texas Farm Bureau

I always look forward to answering questions about U.S. agriculture and what I do for a living on my family farm in Wilson County.

Modern agriculture is diverse. It's understandable there might be questions.

Here are some common questions about agriculture that you might have wanted to ask but never had the opportunity:

If a farm is large, does that mean it is a corporate farm?

Just because a farm is large in number of acres or livestock does not mean it is a corporate farm. Individuals, family partnerships or family corporations own 98 percent of all U.S. farms and ranches. Non-family corporations own just 2 percent of America's farms and ranches. In recent years, some of these family farms have chosen to incorporate to take advantages of taxes, business structure, family home protection, etc.

Will we need more farmers to feed the growing population?

There are two issues to break down in this question. First, by 2050, there will be nearly 10 billion people on Earth. This is about 3 billion more mouths

to feed than there were in 2010. But this does not automatically mean we will need more farmers. Technology will play a key role in increasing efficiency to meet the rising food demand. However, it is important to note that America's population of farmers and ranchers is aging. The average age of farmers is 57.5 years, which means the U.S. will need to cultivate a new generation of farmers and ranchers to fill the gaps left by those retiring in the next 20 years. Texas Farm Bureau is actively addressing the need to develop the next generation of agricultural producers.

Are beef animals consuming grain that could be used to feed humans?

If we take into consideration the entire lifetime feed intake of cattle, only 7 percent of their diet is made up of grain. The other 93 percent of the animal's lifetime diet will consist largely of feed that is inedible to humans. For every 0.6 pounds of human-edible protein cattle consume, there is a return of 1 pound of human-edible protein in the form of beef. And 86 percent of what livestock eat globally is not in competition with human food.

Cattle are ruminant animals, meaning they have a four-chambered stomach. This unique stomach system is found in other farm animals such as sheep and goats. These animals have the ability to graze pastures and eat forages that humans and other animals with non-ruminant stomachs cannot digest due to the fiber content. Cattle diets also consist of feed that has been converted from grain milling and processing waste. Cattle are able to convert this into a high-quality protein for their diets.

Can eating a genetically modified fruit or vegetable change a person's genes?

Eating genetically modified (GM) products does not impact our genes. Our bodies digest the proteins and absorb the amino acids in food. The body cannot tell where a protein comes from, and it treats all proteins alike. There are 10 GM crops commercially available in the U.S. today. The health and safety of GM products have been validated by many independent scientists and organizations around the world. There is no difference in safety from non-GM products.

If you have other food or agriculture questions, just ask any farmer or rancher. They'll be happy to share about their important role in growing our food and fiber.

Other common questions about agriculture are answered in a great resource from the American Farm Bureau Foundation for Agriculture at <https://www.agfoundation.org/common-questions>, and you can take a bite out of these [farm facts](#), too!



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Kaci Temples is **FIT** for **FARMING**

By Jennifer Dorsett
Field Editor

Kaci Temples is busy. Like any farm mom, she has a child to raise and a household to run. But she also happens to be the primary farmer and rancher on her family's poultry farms and ranch in East Texas.

While she didn't intend to carry on the family business, it's a lifestyle she has come to appreciate.

"I realized early on after graduating college I did not like being inside 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on a daily basis. It basically crushed my soul. I don't know that raising chickens was my childhood dream, but it's a good life," Temples said. "I'm self-employed. I don't have anyone telling me what time to go to lunch or when to be somewhere. You set your own hours, and you know what needs to be done to make your business successful. It's very satisfying."

Temples grew up in Titus County on the land she now works, learning to raise poultry and cattle and watching her parents' loving partnership in life and farming.

After graduating from Texas A&M University with a degree in animal science, Temples moved back to Mount Pleasant. She worked at a poultry supply company during the week, helped her parents on the farm in the evenings and worked at a winery on the weekends.

But after her mother was diagnosed with cancer in 2008, Temples took on a more active role in the family operation.

"Between doctor's appointments and treatments in Dallas, it became more evident I needed to quit the poultry supply and help my dad full time," Temples said. "They always worked as a partnership, so I needed to take over her role for a while."

Temples' mother lost her fight with cancer after a five-year battle.

"She fought hard for many years before succumbing in May 2013," she said. "When you lose your mom, you feel sort of lost for a while, so I just kept helping my dad and eventually the farm became my career, too."

And a visit with a poultry technician from the nearby Pilgrim's Pride facility soon helped her find a reason to smile again.

"My husband, Greg, and I met a few months after my mom passed away. He was in the industry, too, working at Pilgrim's, so that's how we met," Temples said. "We married in November 2014 and bought our own poultry farm about a year later. He's the now the breeder/hatchery manager at Pilgrim's, so he stays plenty busy with his job, as well."

Temple's days are full of poultry, cattle, fitness and family. In addition to the two poultry farms and a 150-head crossbred cow-calf operation, she and Greg have a 3-year-old son, Timber.

“Greg has the corporate job, so he’s gone every day doing that. It’s essentially me running both the farms. We have a helper that helps me out with the manual labor, but all the things that need to be fixed, checked and overseen throughout the day—that’s all me,” she said. “On the side, I’m a fitness coach, where I try to help people with their health and fitness goals. That’s my mental outlet, so I don’t get so bogged down by all the demands. Fitness is a good mental release from the stress of everyday life and having a toddler, and it helps balance out the mental creative aspect of a career that’s so physically demanding.”

Being a young female in an industry largely populated by older men isn’t a fact that crosses her mind too often.

“On a daily level, you don’t think much about being a young female farmer. You’re just doing your job and generally are alone while you’re doing it. Agriculture as a whole is a sort of isolated industry. We don’t encounter a lot of people day-to-day,” Temples said. “I see people when I pick up feed or when I pass them on the highway, but you’re pretty much alone all day, every day. So, I don’t really think much about it.”

Temples is reminded of the situation when she attends grower meetings or conferences or when well-meaning people ask why she doesn’t keep her son at home with her all day.

“After we had our son, I felt like people would sometimes judge me a little bit, because I had him at a private babysitter. Then, we put him in preschool at 18 months old. People have asked me, ‘Can’t you just take him with you?’ or ‘Why did you put him in preschool when you’re at home all day?’”

There are times where she must devote her entire attention to fixing an issue or solving a problem, which would leave her son unsupervised. The choices she and her husband have made are the right ones for their family.

“I’m the one juggling parenting and raising animals,” Temples said. “On my good days, I can be done by 1 p.m. and have a couple of hours to myself to get some lunch, get a workout in and then I can go pick him up. And sometimes it doesn’t happen that way, but I do the best I can.”

And other parents aren’t expected to perform a full-time job every day while managing childcare at the same time, she noted.

“If your kid gets sick, with a normal job, you can call in that day. But in agriculture, the animals still need to eat, so I just figure out how to deal with that as best as I can and just keep going,” she said. “That’s the only time I’ve really felt the difference in being a female farmer.”

Despite the challenges, Temples said she would encourage anyone who dreams of a career in production agriculture to dive in.

“Don’t let gender be an issue. If that’s what you want to do with your life—continue your family farm or start your own and become a first-generation farmer or rancher, don’t let gender hold you back,” she said. “Understand that agriculture can be a lonely profession, so it does help if you have an outlet to help you not get so down on the bad days. There are days when the sun is shining, and it’s 78 degrees, and you’re so thankful to be there to experience that. Then, there are days when it’s only 30 degrees, and it’s icy and snowing and you still have to feed the cows. Farming is a balance, just like anything. But it’s worthwhile, and it’s a good life.”



“If that’s what you want to do with your life—continue your family farm or start your own and become a first-generation farmer or rancher, don’t let gender hold you back.”

—Kaci Temples



Photos courtesy Kaci Temples

FAMILY, FOOTBALL AND FARMING

One West Texas family's careers have taken them from the cotton field to the football field and back again

By Jennifer Dorsett
Field Editor

Farming is closely intertwined with family. The majority of farms in the U.S. are family farms, and there's a special bond between generations as they work the land and raise animals together.

And for Don Carthel, a Parmer County Farm Bureau member and cotton farmer, football is also closely intertwined with family. Don is a retired FCS division (formerly called I-AA) football coach whose son, Colby, followed in his footsteps.

"I grew up in Friona on my family's farm. I wanted to be a football coach instead of a farmer, so I went that route," Don said.

Don played football at Eastern New Mexico University (ENMU). After graduating college and coaching at the high school level and as a coordinator for a university, he accepted his first head coaching job at Lubbock Christian College (now Lubbock Christian University). In 1985, he became the head coach at his alma mater, ENMU.

But the call of the land never quite worked its way out of Don's soul. In 1991, after ENMU won the Lone Star Conference Championship, he went back to his agricultural roots.

"I coached until my kids were starting high school and went back to farming in Friona with my dad," Don said. "A farm life is a good life for a family, and I wanted them to have some of those same experiences. My daughter had a hoeing crew and ran the spray rig, and Colby helped on the farm, driving tractors and doing all the things farmers have to do to get the work done."

Colby credits his success on the field to the lessons he learned in the cotton field.

"People always want to know where I got my drive from, and I always say a lot of the success I've had in life and in coaching is because I was raised on a farm," he said. "I love farming. If I weren't coaching, I'd be farming."

After Colby graduated high school in 1995, he headed to Angelo State University to play college football. And like his father before him, he began a coaching career after graduation.

Colby's career started at Abilene Christian University (ACU), where he was the defensive line coach and recruiting coordinator.



But what happened next wasn't the typical farm-to-school-and-back-again story.

That's because after Colby and his sister had graduated high school, their dad was back on the gridiron.

Don did some volunteer coaching at ACU before being hired as the head coach and general manager of the Amarillo Dusters, an indoor football team of the Intense Football League (IFL).

After a successful 15-3 season and clinching the IFL championship with the Dusters in 2004, Don was hired as the head coach at nearby West Texas A&M University (WTAMU) for the upcoming 2005 season.

In 2006, Don named Colby defensive coordinator at WTAMU, bringing father and son together as professionals for the first time.

"I volunteered at ACU while he was there to help out, but it was really a blessing to have that time we spent together at WTAMU," Don said.

It was a special time for both, Colby reflected.

"We were there for seven years together and had a great run," he said. "We had the most successful football team in state of Texas at that time."

While at WTAMU, Don took the WTAMU Buffaloes to their first Lone Star Conference Championship in almost 20 years. He left WTAMU in



2013 with a head coach career record of 124 wins, 69 losses and one tie.

Texas A&M-Commerce (TAMUC) hired Colby as head coach in 2013, and Don watched happily from the sidelines as Colby's career continued to shine. From 2013-2017, Colby and the TAMUC Lions brought home at least seven wins each season, three postseason appearances and two Lone Star Conference championships.

In 2018, Colby was named head coach at Stephen F. Austin University (SFA). He and his wife, Sarah, are busy coaching (Sarah, a former Lone Star Conference championship volleyball player, is now a volunteer assistant volleyball coach at SFA) and raising their three sons, Major, Bear and Stone.

When he's not busy farming, Don is a volunteer coach for Colby's SFA Lumberjacks.

"Colby gives me some responsibilities, and I help with breaking down film on special teams, mainly," Don said. "Sunday and Monday, I review films and send in my suggestions for the week. Then, I'll show up Thursday or Friday to watch practices, and then during the game I stay in the press box. Most of the coaches were with us at WTAMU, too, so it's really fun to be with them on the weekends also."

And in 2020, through an unfortunate series of events, Don had the opportunity to put the headset on as head coach one more time.

"As a team, we've been testing three times a week to try to keep everyone safe and healthy, and it turned out in October that I had a positive test," Colby said. "We had a contingency plan in case I got COVID, and that was for Dad to take over if I got sick. Well, it happened."

Although his only symptoms were loss of smell and a backache, a second COVID-19 test confirmed Colby's diagnosis, sending him and his immediate family into a mandatory quarantine period.

Don was harvesting cotton in Friona when the call came in.

"I called my folks, and mom was worried. Of course, dad was worried too, but he jumped off the stripper and hopped in the pickup and drove nine hours down to Nacogdoches to be sure he was here in time for practice that next morning," Colby said.

It wasn't just any game Colby needed Don to step in for—it was against Colby's alma mater, ASU. And Don came through in typical Carthel fashion, clinching a solid win against a big rival.

"That Saturday, he got to roam the sidelines one last time and did a great job with it and got win 125 of his career," Colby said. "The team and the players were going nuts and had a big time after the game. They got the win, and it all made for a great feel-good story in 2020. Those are hard to come by, so we're sure proud of how it all went down."

Don said he was just glad he could help.

"You betcha we won," he said, laughing. "I was so afraid he'd fire me from volunteering ever again if I lost that game!"

He downplayed the importance of his role, saying instead he just helped "do some things" so the coordinators didn't have to try to juggle their regular jobs and handle head coaching duties, too.

But Colby knows better. All those hours on the farm made his dad who and what he is today.

"There are lots of similarities between farming and coaching, and I think doing one sets you up for the other," Colby said. "There's highs and there's lows in farming and in coaching. You can be busting your tail and have a great-looking cotton crop and get hailed out right before harvest. It's the same in coaching. You can have a beautiful play set up, and the player drops the ball, and it would've been the game-winning touchdown. But sometimes that just happens. They're very similar."

Don stepping into the head coaching role for Colby was an experience neither of them will ever forget.

After recovering from COVID-19, Colby was back on the sidelines for the remainder of the 2020-21 season, and Don went back to his cotton fields in the Texas Panhandle.

Even after all those years on the gridiron, Don said he'll always enjoy being in the cotton field.

"We've been family farmers for a long time," he said. "My parents had four boys, and three of us are still farming and the fourth one is an ag pilot. My granddad farmed here, and my dad farmed before me, and now I'm doing it."

And Colby may yet follow in Don's footsteps there, too.

"Hoeing cotton, moving pipe, throwing hay bales...all that stuff helps you develop a work ethic that will carry you pretty far in life," Colby said. "And I still don't know that farming isn't in my future. I'd be just as happy farming as coaching. We'll just have to see where life takes us yet."



TFB scholarships available to Texas high school, college students

**By Julie Tomascik
Editor**

The future of our state and nation relies on Texas youth. They have opportunities for growth, education and leadership to help them explore a changing new world, but sometimes they need a helping hand.

That's why Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) invests in youth, devoting large amounts of money and time to develop leadership skills at a young age.

That investment comes through scholarships at the state and county levels.

Each year, Texas Farm Bureau awards more than \$200,000 in scholarships, and over \$350,000 in scholarships is given each year through county Farm Bureaus.

"From high school seniors to enrolled college students and students pursuing technical degrees, there are a variety of Farm Bureau scholarships available," Mia Balko, TFB director of Youth

Outreach, said. "These scholarships and awards are another way that Texas Farm Bureau and county Farm Bureaus invest in the future of our communities, state and agriculture."

Applicants must create an account and register through the MyTFB Membership portal at my.texasfarmbureau.org. Once there, navigate to registration, and select 2021 scholarships from the list.

All scholarships require the

student to be part of a TFB member-family to qualify, and membership must be maintained for the duration of the scholarship.

The deadline to apply and submit a completed application online is March 5 before midnight.

Visit www.texasfarmbureau.org/youth/youth-opportunities for more information and the scholarship application checklist.

Contact Balko at mbalko@txfb.org with questions.

Dick Mitchell Scholarship

This \$1,000 scholarship is awarded to one high school senior who has attended the TFB Youth Leadership Conference or Virtual Leadership Conference.

Young Farmer & Rancher Scholarship

High school seniors pursuing a degree in agriculture are eligible for TFB's Young Farmer & Rancher scholarship. Each of TFB's 13 districts will award one \$1,000 scholarship.

Memorial/Honorary and District Scholarships

In each of the 13 TFB districts, one student will be awarded a \$1,500 scholarship. Three students from each district also will be awarded a \$1,000 scholarship.

S.M. True Jr. Agricultural Scholar Award

To acknowledge former TFB President S.M. True Jr., a \$20,000 scholarship was established for college students enrolled in an undergraduate degree program with at least 60 hours of college credit and who have declared agriculture as their major.

Applicants must submit a completed application and two letters of recommendation—one from the county Farm Bureau president and one from the dean or head of the agricultural department of the applicant's college or university. Students are encouraged to apply at the end of their sophomore year for TFB's most prestigious scholarship.

Young Farmer & Rancher Enrolled Scholarship

The Young Farmer & Rancher Enrolled Scholarship is for students already in college pursuing undergraduate degrees. Applicants must have completed a minimum of 45 credit hours and a GPA of 2.5 or higher to qualify. Three \$2,000 Young Farmer & Rancher Enrolled scholarships will be awarded.

Student Teaching Award

Four senior Agricultural Education students will receive the Texas Farm Bureau Student Teaching Award each semester.

The scholarships, valued at \$1,500, aim to help students cover expenses during their semester of off-campus student teaching. Students who will be student teaching off-campus in fall 2021 are encouraged to apply.

A second application process will open later this year for those student teaching in the spring.

TSTC Scholarships

TFB has made scholarship funds available to first-year and enrolled students attending Texas State Technical College (TSTC). Fifty \$1,000 scholarships are awarded on a first-come, first-served basis through the Texan Success Scholarship.

There are also five \$1,000 scholarships for TFB members entering their second year at TSTC.

Another \$5,000 is available through the "Helping Hands" scholarship, which is meant to help students with unexpected costs that are not usually covered by traditional scholarships.

Take a bite out of these FARM FACTS!

Texas has **156,233** female farmers and ranchers, which is more than any other state



88 inches of red cotton thread

makes the stitching on a baseball



The cork and rubber of a baseball is wrapped in **657 feet of wool yarn**

Texas leads the nation in the number of farms with **248,416** farms covering **127 million acres**

Texas is the **fifth-largest dairy producing state**

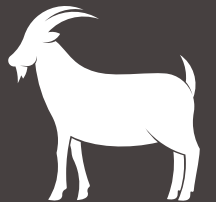


Dairy products pump **\$39.5 billion** into the Texas economy

There are more than **4,200** uses for **corn**



Texas leads the nation in number of **cattle and calves, sheep and goats.**



Texas is one of **three sugarcane-growing states**



Americans spend the least for food. For the past two decades, U.S. consumers have spent an **average of just 10% of their disposal income** on food each year. Citizens in other countries spend much more.

UNITED STATES

10%

BRAZIL

16%

CHINA

22%

MEXICO

23%

KENYA

53%

Texas Farm Bureau members receive **Ford bonus cash offer**

By Julie Tomascik
Editor

Early mornings, late nights and on the weekends—Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) members drive a lot of miles. And the right vehicle is needed to help get you through it all.

Texas Farm Bureau's (TFB) member benefit with Ford Motor Company can help save on those vehicles.

Members can receive \$500 bonus cash on the purchase or lease of a new 2020/2021/2022 Ranger, F-150 or Super Duty truck.

The offer is available to TFB members through Jan. 3, 2022.

"It's an exciting time to be a Texas Farm Bureau member," Whitney Richter, marketing coordinator for TFB's member benefits program, said. "This continued collaboration with Ford allows members to get Ford vehicles that are built tough. So, take advantage of this offer when searching for a new vehicle this year."

Visit fordfarmbureauadvantage.com to take advantage of this offer. On the website, enter your member information, zip code and select the vehicle of interest to download the certificate to present to the local Ford dealership.

This incentive is not available on F-150 Raptor, F-600, F-650 and F-750 Super Duty trucks.

TFB launched the Ford member benefit program in 2015, helping save members millions of dollars.

To be eligible for this private offer, individual, family or business members must maintain an active TFB membership for 30 consecutive days prior to the purchase.

This special offer is not available with some other offers. If you have questions or need help obtaining the certificate, please call 254-399-5034 or email memberbenefits@txfb.org.

In addition to the Ford program, TFB members can also take advantage of savings with more than 60 member exclusive discounts.

"We are committed to providing TFB members with benefits and exclusive discounts to help save time and money," Richter said. "Your membership provides value and impact. Together, we are the Texas Farm Bureau family."

[Click here for a complete list of benefits and services for TFB members.](#)



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Raising cane

In the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, farmers like Bryce Wilde grow the Lone Star State's sweetest crop: sugarcane.

By Jennifer Dorsett
Field Editor

From homemade candy and cookies during the holidays to sweet tea, some of our favorite foods and drinks are based on pure cane sugar. And in the Rio Grande Valley, farmers like Bryce Wilde and his family help make Texas a little sweeter with their sugarcane crop.

"It takes a lot of management. It takes a lot of labor, but the returns on it are enough for us to be excited about growing it year after year," Wilde, a third-generation sugarcane farmer from Lyford, said. "It's a crop that's very hard to grow in certain conditions, but the Rio Grande Valley is well-positioned geographically to grow sugarcane due to our climate and location."





A sweet start

Growing sugarcane is slightly different than growing other row crops. Live stalks are planted into the ground, not seed. An 8- to 10-inch length of cane, called a billet, is placed—usually by hand—into prepared rows that are then covered with a layer of topsoil.

Each internode on the billet can produce a vegetative bud that turns into new cane, with an average of three to four new plants per billet.

Sugarcane is also different than other row crops because it is a “ra-tooning” plant, which means it grows each year after it is harvested.

Each field has a life span of four to five years before it needs to be replanted. The planting season runs from August to December, and a field takes anywhere from 12 to 16 months to mature.



Harvest heats up

Sugarcane isn't just grown in the Valley. It's also milled there.

Rio Grande Valley Sugar Growers, the only sugar mill in Texas, is a co-op of more than 120 growers in Willacy, Cameron and Hidalgo counties.

Farmers individually own and grow their sugarcane crops. Then, the mill harvests and processes the sugar for transport to refineries located in Louisiana.

Harvest season takes place from October to mid-March or early April and is a round-the-clock operation.

And things heat up quickly.

Sugarcane fields are burned prior to harvesting to remove the grassy tops, straw and leaves. The fire consumes extraneous leaf matter, but not the cane, which is where the sugar content is found.

“The main reason we burn is for harvest efficiency,” Wilde said. “They start burning from the perimeter. They start on the outside, and they burn the whole outside with a flamethrower. And it goes up fast. A 40-acre field will go up in 20 to 30 minutes.”

Burning the sugarcane field reduces transportation costs, uses less fuel and improves harvesting and milling efficiency. It also kills off microorganisms and removes some of the hard, waxy outer surface of the canes.

Field burns are coordinated between the mill, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) and the local fire department in each county.

A combination of crop conditions, temperature, wind speeds and humidity levels must be met for a scheduled burning to take place. Prior to burning, signs are posted around the field and residents are notified.

Within a day after a burn is complete, harvest begins. Sucrose loss in the cane will begin to occur shortly after burning, as plants begin to use some of that reserved energy to regenerate leaves.

Loss of sugar content impacts yields, so different shifts of harvesting teams are at work all hours of the day.

A cane harvester goes down each row and cuts the stalks off at the base. As the canes travel through the machine, they are cut into consistent segments that are deposited into an accompanying transport buggy pulled by a tractor. The transport buggies take the cane to semi-truck trailers.

When a truck has a full load, the sugarcane heads to the mill for offloading and processing.

The cut cane will continue to lose sugar content, so once the mill begins operations, the plant runs all day and night for the entire six-month season.



Milling sugarcane

The mill, which has been in business for more than 45 years, processes about 1,000 tons of raw sugar each day. And it's a self-sustaining operation.

The cane segments, or billets, are first dumped into a large conveyer system, where they are rinsed. As the billets travel through this system, they are crushed and shredded to prepare for juice extracting.

The remaining fiber and stalks, known as bagasse, are used as a fuel source for the boilers at the mill.

Tony Prado, agricultural superintendent for the mill, said electricity is even contributed back to the power grid at times.

“The bagasse is used for burning to generate steam in the boiler system,” Prado said. “We're able to produce enough kilowatts during the day to power the entire small community of Santa Rosa.”

Even the rinsed-off dirt, ash and sediment are reused. It composts over time and can be reused as fertilizer in the fields.

The juice extracted from the canes eventually gets separated into two products: crystallized sugar and blackstrap molasses. The crystallized sugar is stored until it can be sent to refineries for further processing into pure white cane sugar, while the molasses gets used in animal feed.

Working to make life sweet

Farmers like Wilde and the Rio Grande Valley community work together to make Texas a little sweeter.

“We're very proud of what we do down here,” Wilde said. “It's been an incredible asset to our communities. We employ over 400 employees down here. A lot of people depend on the sugar mill, and that's what we're real proud of. We get to help out a lot of our community through growing this great crop.”



TEACHING

kids to care about food

By Jennifer Dorsett
Field Editor

Shortly after she started teaching, Martha McLeod was disappointed to see her students throwing away uneaten, unspoiled food into cafeteria trash cans.

"It just blew me away when I saw kids throwing away a whole apple or a perfect banana," McLeod said. "They had no idea what farmers went through to get that crop to their table. I knew I had to do something to change that."

Now, her love of agriculture and passion for sharing that knowledge has earned her recognition from the state's largest general farm and ranch organization.

McLeod, who is in her 17th year as a teacher at Fulton 3-5 Learning Center, was named Texas Farm Bureau's (TFB) 2020 Agriculture in the Classroom Outstanding Teacher. She was recognized during TFB's virtual 87th annual meeting held Nov. 30 and Dec. 5.

She was nominated by San Patricio County Farm Bureau (CFB), who noticed her enthusiasm for agriculture and how she teaches her students about food systems, conservation, natural resources and other agricultural science concepts.

"Martha is an outstanding elementary school teacher who actively incorporates the basics of agricultural principles into her lessons," San Patricio CFB President Colin Chopelas wrote in a nomination letter. "She does this by having students plant and grow many varieties of vegetables, including corn, beets, turnips and carrots, as well as maintain and manage a

small-scale poultry farm where eggs are gathered daily, packaged and sold to teachers and members of the community."

Her passion for agriculture and outdoor learning stems from growing up on a South Texas farm and ranch and a desire for her students to share her love of farming and the land.

McLeod teaches science to third-, fourth- and fifth-grade students through a variety of hands-on activities. Agricultural literacy is increased by exposing students to concepts such as soil enrichment, tilling, germination, pollination and photosynthesis, plant maturity, harvest, life cycles, weathering and erosion, decomposition and nutrient recycling.

She began her agricultural education program by placing a bucket in the school cafeteria for the children to deposit their food waste. At the end of the day, students take the buckets to feed the chickens, giving them a sense of what it takes to raise animals at scale.

"Chickens have been a big 'aha' for kids and colleagues alike. A misconception many people have is how many eggs are laid a day—they realize one chicken doesn't lay a dozen eggs a day. It's one egg per hen per day," McLeod said. "And they don't know about things like food cycles, dirt baths, harvesting, maturity, invasive species. Kids that are second-language learners are picking up these terms. When you put emotion and passion into a child, they care."

The program grew from feeding food waste to the chickens to selling eggs, raising vegetables, planting native habitat for pollinators and wildlife and so much more.

Now, in addition to working production agriculture models, McLeod teaches her students about the recycling of natural resources, wildlife conservation, pollinator preservation, birding and fishing.

"I'm teaching the second generation of students now here at this school. When I see my former students I taught 20 years ago and I'm now teaching their children, do they talk about the state test? No," McLeod said. "What do they remember most? They talk about picking a fresh tomato, or the time they kept the class guinea pig. They remember farming and caring for animals. Did I accomplish my goals? Check."

"Martha is a shining example of a passionate educator who's building a lifelong love for science and agriculture in the next generation," TFB President Russell Boening said. "She truly wants her students to understand where their food and fiber comes from, so she creates engaging and hands-on lessons for them to learn these concepts. We're proud to recognize her efforts in the classroom."

In recognition of her accomplishment, McLeod will receive a \$600 cash award, as well as an expense-paid trip to attend the National Agriculture in the Classroom Conference next summer. San Patricio CFB also will receive a \$400 cash award for her nomination.

McLeod will be nominated for the National Excellence in Teaching about Agriculture award.

[Visit TFB's Ag in the Classroom page for more resources and information.](#)

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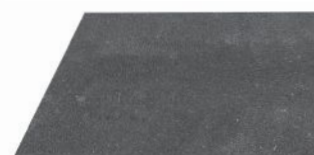
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Hansliks' desire to innovate *helps family farm*



tinue the family tradition and raise their children, Blakely and Kade, in the same way is an honor, Matt said.

“Living on a farm is very rewarding. It makes me proud to see all our hard work pay off when we are harvesting, cutting hay or selling cattle,” he said. “It’s a great feeling to be a role model for my kids and to be part of the 2 percent feeding the rest of the world. There are a lot of long hours and late nights, but it’s all worth it.”

Although it wasn’t how she grew up, Jessica can’t imagine a different lifestyle for their family.

“I definitely wouldn’t have it any other way. Our kids are learning life lessons here on the farm—hard work, ethics and responsibility,” she said. “It’s just a different way of life than living in the city. We go to church on Sundays, and after church, we go feed all the cows. We’re constantly out here working. We’re not inside people. All the extra stuff to do out here is just fun for us. We don’t consider it work.”

**By Jennifer Dorsett
Field Editor**

It’s an age-old question—which came first: the chicken or the egg? The fertilizer or the feed? According to Matt and Jessica Hanslik, it’s all interconnected.

On their farm and ranch in Lavaca County, they grow corn and hay, raise cattle and are part owners of an all-natural fertilizer company, in which they take chicken litter and “upcycle” it for use as farm fertilizer.

The idea for the fertilizer business was hatched when Jessica, a manager for a shell egg company, suggested they begin using chicken litter from area broiler houses to fertilize their fields.

“Then, the company that I work for moved from waste lagoons over to dry manure belts, where manure is conveyed on moving belts outside of the chicken houses. We saw this as an opportunity, so we put a business plan together and started picking up the dry poultry litter and spreading it out on other farms and ranches,” she said. “The chicken manure is full of organic matter and micronutrients. We use it as an all-natural alternative to liquid fertilizer to fertilize the fields, which grow the corn and the hay, which feeds the animals and in turn, provides food for us. So, it all comes full circle.”

Now, in addition to farming and ranching full time, Matt sells the chicken litter to other local farmers and ranchers who are interested in using the fertilizer to boost yields in their own operations.

The path to where they are today involved much planning, ingenuity and hard work.

Growing up in suburban Tomball, Jessica was introduced to agriculture through FFA. During high school, her love for the industry bloomed. Jessica went on to earn a degree in poultry science from Texas A&M University, which led her to her career with Cal-Maine Foods.

“My husband and I are blessed to have the opportunity to do what we love. I love that I’m able to use what I learned in school in both my career and on our operation,” she said. “Matt originally worked for a large energy company right out of college. He had just a regular 8-to-5 job, but his passion was really to be out here on the farm, working every single day. Starting this fertilizer company has allowed him to go ahead and start farming full time.”

Matt, a fifth-generation farmer and rancher, has always had a passion for agriculture and the rural lifestyle.

“I grew up here, working alongside my dad and grandfather raising cattle, corn and hay. I went to school at Texas A&M-Kingsville, and I came home every weekend to work on the farm. It’s just what I always wanted to do,” he said.

The Hansliks are heavily involved in Farm Bureau at the county and state levels. Matt currently serves as the Lavaca County Farm Bureau’s committee chair for Youth and Young Farmer & Rancher activities. Jessica is on the Lavaca County Farm Bureau board of directors. She also serves on the Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) Poultry Advisory Committee and served on the 2020 TFB Resolutions Committee.

Previously, the couple served as District 12 representatives on TFB’s YF&R Advisory Committee.

Their advocacy work through the organization and the ability to con-



“ Living on a farm is very rewarding. It makes me proud to see all our hard work pay off when we are harvesting, cutting hay or selling cattle. It’s a great feeling to be a role model for my kids and to be part of the 2 percent feeding the rest of the world. There are a lot of long hours and late nights, but it’s all worth it. ”

—Matt Hanslik





THIS IS FARM BUREAU

TFB to host virtual event for high school science teachers

By Julie Tomascik
Editor

To help high school science teachers explore agriculture and incorporate agricultural concepts in their classroom, Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) is hosting a virtual Teacher Ag Academy.

The free, one-hour event is set for 4:15-5:15 p.m. on Feb. 2.

“This professional development event will challenge certified, Texas high school science teachers to grow and integrate agriculture into the classroom,” Jordan Walker, TFB director of Educational Outreach, said. “Agriculture today looks much different than it did just five years ago. Those advancements in agriculture, including technologies and farming practices, that make agriculture safe and efficient can be explored in a high school science class.”

The ag academy will feature a presentation from Sarah Eder, who teaches about biotechnology and OnRamps physics at El Campo High School.

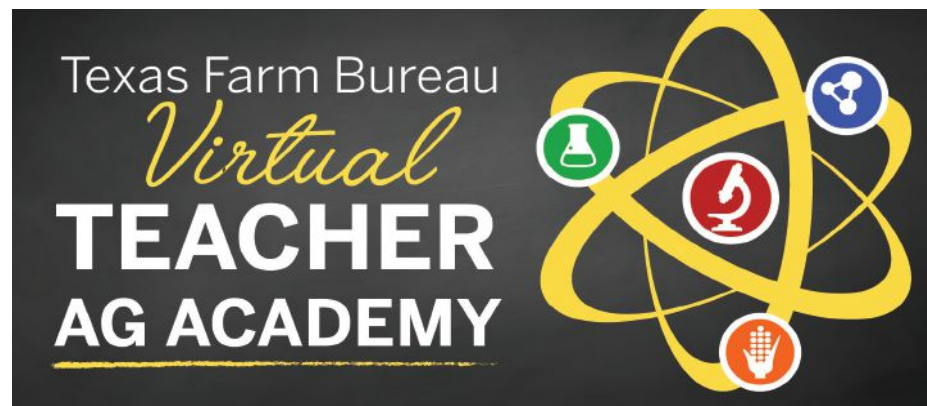
Eder encourages students to

explore careers in agriculture and discover the many ways biotechnology is used in plant breeding to improve crop yields and increase disease resistance.

Each semester, her class identifies key scientific discoveries and how they influence the future of agriculture.

In the Teacher Ag Academy, Eder will share more information about how she ties agriculture into the science concepts her students learn in the classroom.

“Agriculture is truly embedded in what is known as STEM—science, technology, engineering and math—education that many schools have adopted,” Walker said. “Agriculture is the science of growing crops, raising livestock and developing new crop varieties. It’s the technology to grow more with less using precision ag tools, and it’s the engineering on farms that allow for more efficient and sustainable production. It’s the math involved to determine nutritious rations for livestock, and so much more. Those concepts tie directly to



concepts students learn in the classroom.”

Walker noted that teachers also will learn about credible agricultural education resources available from TFB and the American Farm Bureau Federation.

Registration for the event is free and closes on Wednesday, Jan. 27.

“If you know a Texas science teacher looking for more information about agriculture, we hope you encourage them to attend our virtual event,” Walker said. “Our hope is to engage with science teachers to help them increase agricultural literacy and awareness in their classrooms, as well as provide them ideas and

resources they can utilize with their students regardless of how they’re learning—virtually or face-to-face.”

All teachers who register and attend will be entered into a drawing for a giveaway.

Continuing professional education credits will be available.

Teachers can register online at <https://txfb.us/scienceteacher-agacademy>.

For more information about the virtual Teacher Ag Academy for high school science teachers, email edoutreach@txfb.org or call 254-751-2569.

Get additional Ag in the Classroom resources and lesson plans online from TFB.

New Texas Farm Bureau officers, state directors elected

By Julie Tomascik
Editor

During Texas Farm Bureau’s 87th Annual Meeting, new officers and board members were elected.

Mark Daniel of Baylor County was elected vice president, and Walt Hagood of Lynn-Garza County was elected secretary-treasurer.

Daniel has a cow-calf and hay operation and owns a cattle-trucking service, and Hagood is a cotton farmer on the Texas South Plains.

Re-elected to two-year terms were Hagood, John Paul Dineen III of Ellis County, Mickey Edwards of Lampasas County and Pete Pawelek of Atascosa County.

Two new directors were also elected.

Warren Cude of Fort Stockton is the new District 6 state director. He has a commercial cow-calf operation and raises registered and commercial sheep. He also operates a helicopter service for livestock gathering and predation management. Cude previously served as president and vice president of Pecos-Reeves County Farm Bureau. He participated in TFB’s leadership program, FarmLead, and served on TFB’s Sheep and Goat, Animal Health and Predator advisory committees, as well as the state Resolutions Committee. He and his

wife, Darla, have one son and two grandchildren.

The new District 12 state director is Brian Adamek of Victoria.

He grows corn and cotton in Victoria County. Adamek served several years in numerous roles, including president, on the Victoria County Farm Bureau board of directors. He participated in AgLead, a TFB leadership program, and served as TFB’s Young Farmer & Rancher Advisory



Warren Cude



Brian Adamek

Committee chair. He and his wife, Jaclyn, have two sons.

Cude and Adamek will serve two-year terms.

[Read more about the state directors online.](#)

Texas Farm Bureau announces Farm From School program

**By Jennifer Dorsett
Field Editor**

Texas students can now virtually visit farms from their classrooms with the new Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) Farm From School program.

Set to launch for the spring 2021 semester, Farm From School aims to connect kindergarten through second-grade students with farmers in their area to see and learn first-hand where and how food is grown and raised.

“The goal of the program is to really engage young students in the classroom by giving them unique opportunities to see how agriculture fits into things they’re learning and how it’s part of their daily lives,” Jordan Walker, TFB director of Educational Outreach, said. “Even when kids are engaging in a more ‘normal’ learning schedule and environment, there are so many who don’t have the opportunity to take field trips to

a farm or ranch, so this is a way of bringing the farm or ranch to them.”

Ten teachers from each of TFB’s 13 districts will be selected to participate (click here to see TFB’s 13 districts). Classes will be assigned to a farmer in that school’s TFB district for the duration of the spring semester.

Walker noted each farmer will be assigned to classes with monthly virtual meetings, and all classes in the district will tune in and “meet” the farmer on the same day.

“Classrooms will connect virtually with their farmer or rancher through a once-a-month video conference February through May. During the rest of each month, the kids will connect with farmers by writing them letters,” she said. “In the letters, they can ask them questions they’d like answered about what’s happening on the farm or ranch or maybe get an answer to a general question they’ve

always had about agriculture.”

Throughout the semester, students will participate in lessons incorporating agriculture and learn more about agricultural concepts introduced through the virtual meetings.

All classes that complete the program will receive a T-shirt for each student.

Every primary participating teacher will be given a children’s book that accurately portrays agriculture, gain access to TFB’s extensive agricultural education resources and receive one 32-cell starter tray gardening kit for their classroom.

“It’s a way for students to be present in the field with the farmer and rancher and see what’s growing, what the animals are doing, what they’re being fed,”



Walker said. “Getting to know the farmer really personalizes the experience, and we’re excited to see how the kids and farmers engage throughout the program.”

Click here to sign up. Space is limited.

Additional details are available at texasfarmbureau.org/aitc.

Contact Walker at jwalker1@txfb.org or call 254.751.2569 with questions.



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2021 Texas Farm Bureau PHOTO CONTEST

It's time once again for the annual Texas Farm Bureau photography contest, when you or someone you know can share your best pictures with the entire Lone Star State and maybe even win a cash prize.

The deadline for photo submissions in the 2021 contest is June 1.

The contest is limited to members of the Texas Farm Bureau and their immediate families.

Rural settings and rural lifestyles are the preferred themes for all submissions, and contestants are limited to one entry per person.

Four top winners will be selected and published in the July edition of *Texas Agriculture* and the summer edition of *Texas Neighbors*. First place will be awarded a \$250 cash prize, second place will receive \$200 and two honorable mentions

will receive \$100 each.

As in years past, both digital and printed photographs may be submitted. To enter, follow these simple rules:

Digital entries should be e-mailed to photocontest@txfb.org. For publication purposes, photos entered in the contest must be at least 1024 X 768 pixels or higher.

Print entries may be mailed to Photo Contest, TFB Communications Division, P.O. Box 2689, Waco, TX 76702-2689. A self-addressed, stamped envelope needs to accompany your print photo entry if you want your photograph returned.

Include a brief description regarding the entry, plus the participant's name, address, telephone number and valid Texas Farm Bureau membership number.

More information is available at <https://txfb.us/photocontest21>.

Beef and sustainability

just go together

By Julie Tomascik
Editor

Beef is “greener” than you’ve been led to believe.

In fact, livestock production is sustainable, and the beef industry has long implemented sustainability practices to get the product from gate to plate.

Bite into these five beefy facts to learn more:

Cattle convert plants into protein

Upcycling and recycling are trendy, and cows have been doing it for hundreds of years.

Cattle convert plants that are inedible for humans into high-quality protein.

In the U.S., there are about 800 million acres of land that are not suitable for growing crops due to factors like soil conditions, environment and lack of rain. But that land has native grasses that cattle are able to upcycle into tasty protein for humans. Now that’s what I call a win-win!

Low greenhouse gas emissions compared to other sources

Some say beef is the largest culprit of greenhouse gas emissions. But we call bull on that.

In fact, beef cattle accounts for a tiny amount of greenhouse gas emissions—only about 2 percent, according to the [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency](#). And beef cattle production as a whole, including production of animal feed, is responsible for only 3.7 percent of greenhouse gas emissions in the U.S.

The staggering majority of greenhouse gases are due to transportation at 28 percent and electricity generation at nearly 27 percent.

Beef has many health benefits

The internet is full of trendy diets with conflicting advice. But one fact you can always count on—beef is part of a healthy diet.

Beef contains many [essential nutrients](#), including iron, zinc,

vitamin B12 and more. It’s packed with health-promoting amino acids, full of vitamins and it comes in a delicious package with relatively few calories.

Cattle are more than beef

Although the first thing we often think about is beef when it comes to cattle, they’re responsible for so much more. Medicine. Shampoo. Textiles. Jobs. And many other items we use daily.

Cattle help provide us these numerous products and also return value to the ecosystem through grazing.

Cattle help with land management

Grazing cattle can reduce the land’s natural emissions of nitrous oxide, a greenhouse gas that environmentalists agree is more damaging than carbon dioxide.

Cattle also can help manage the forage that fuels wildfires. By grazing down forage, cattle eliminate some of the fuel. Combine that with other management techniques, and research shows the number of wildfires and the severity of the fires could be reduced.

You’ve placed an emphasis on sustainability. So have farmers and ranchers for generations. They’ll continue to do so, too.

They have embraced technologies that reduce emissions and increase efficiency. Farmers and ranchers do more with less, because they are committed to producing the world’s food, feed and fiber in a sustainable way. ([Click here to see how.](#))

As for cattle, they upcycle land that is unsuitable for human food consumption and sequester carbon while doing so. Plus, they improve the soil and provide us with protein we love to enjoy.

And we can. Guilt free.

So, grill that steak or bite into your hamburger. Eat your veggies. And enjoy a cold glass of milk with your dessert. And tip your hat to the Texas farmers and ranchers who helped bring that to your table in a sustainable way.



HOW TO CLEAN AND ORGANIZE YOUR FRIDGE

MAIN COMPARTMENT

Temperature is more stable. Store perishable foods like raw meat, dairy and eggs here.

COOKED LEFTOVERS

Leftovers are safe for 3 to 4 days in the refrigerator.



CLEANING

Clean refrigerator surfaces with hot, soapy water and diluted bleach solution.



Keep refrigerator smelling fresh by placing an opened box of baking soda on a shelf.



FREEZER

Set to 0° or below. Frozen food is safe, though quality may suffer with lengthy storage.

SEALED DRAWERS

Drawers are the best storage option for fruits and vegetables.

DOORS

Temperature changes frequently. Avoid storing perishable foods here.

By Jennifer Dorsett
Field Editor

We're cooking more meals at home, and buying extra snacks for the family.

Because of that, your fridge might be looking a little...well, less than organized. Those extra groceries just get placed in the most convenient spot at the time, leading to grocery chaos and forcing you to spend extra time digging for meal ingredients.

It can seem overwhelming, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Food Safety Specialist Rebecca Dittmar said. But getting the fridge organized can not only save you time but help keep your family safe.

"The refrigerator is a space where practicing a little food safety can go a long way in preventing foodborne illness and keeping your family healthy," Dittmar, the coordinator of the AgriLife Extension Food Protection Management Program, said.

Here are tips to help you clean and organize the refrigerator.

Cleaning

Gather cleaning supplies, such as a small bucket of warm, soapy water, a clean dishcloth and a dry dish towel. You'll probably need a couple of coolers to keep things cold while you work.

As you put things in the cooler, give them a once-over. Check the expiration date. If condiment bottles have sticky sides or messy caps, rinse them off before putting them back in the fridge. Dittmar said to toss anything that's past its use-by date.

If the item has a "best-by" date, it's more about preserving quality, and the item might still be fine to use, she said. But if it's a "use-by" stamp, it might not be safe from a freshness standpoint and should be thrown out. Condiments like chocolate syrup and sriracha sauce may not get used that often, so be sure to check those dates.

After removing everything from the fridge and storing what you'd like to keep in the coolers, remove and hand-wash any removable shelves, racks and drawers.

Tip: Glass components should not be plunged into hot water directly from the fridge or they may crack. Instead, set them aside while you work on the other parts and save the glass pieces for last, after they've warmed up.

While the interior pieces you removed are drying, wipe the entire refrigerator with a clean dishcloth dipped in warm, soapy water.

Mild cleaners such as soap and water are key, Dittmar said. Solvent-based or abrasive cleaners may leave traces of the chemical or small scrubbing particles behind that can contaminate food surfaces and make you ill.

Work from top to bottom so drips don't land on the surfaces you've already cleaned. Be sure to run the dishcloth in the grooves where shelves normally go and carefully wipe off any appliance lighting inside.

Don't forget to also use the dishcloth to clean the gasket around the door and any exposed hinges when you're through with the interior.

For tough-to-reach areas and crevices, an old toothbrush or some cotton swabs may be useful. Anything with soft bristles or a non-scratch surface that helps you reach will do.

Another area to not miss is the door exterior. Wipe the entire surface down, including every part of the handle and the top of the door.

Be sure all the interior components are completely dry before re-installing. Check for any loose screws or pieces while you're putting them back.

Dittmar advises checking your refrigerator's temperature with an appliance thermometer. It should be at or below 40 degrees for optimal safe food storage. Anything warmer can let bacteria multiply, increasing your family's chance of contracting foodborne illness.

Organization

Grab your coolers and settle in front of the fridge for a bit.

Dittmar said it's best not to store dairy products and eggs on the

top shelf.

Warm air rises, so that will be the warmest section of the refrigerator, she said. Instead, dairy and eggs should be kept on the lowest shelf above where any raw meat will be stored, where the fridge tends to be cooler.

Never store raw meat on a high shelf, Dittmar cautioned. Liquid from the meat can drip down onto other foods and contaminate them.

Store raw meat on the lowest shelf or drawer possible, where it won't come into contact with other fresh foods. Store the raw meat in its packaging in a sealed container, baking dish or on a rimmed plate to prevent any accidental leaks or cross-contamination.

The top shelf is a drop zone for ready-to-eat items, fresh herbs, yogurt, cooked leftovers and drinks.

The middle shelves are where other dairy products like milk, sour cream and eggs belong. Dittmar recommends keeping eggs and milk toward the back of the shelf, where it's coldest.

That also goes for the door—don't store dairy or other extremely perishable items there because of the frequent temperature changes. Manufacturers may have special storage slots for eggs or milk jugs, but it's best to keep those items in a colder zone of the fridge, according to Dittmar.

"Opening and shutting the door exposes whatever is in the door to ambient air temperatures and causes temperature fluctuations, so keeping the dairy as far back as possible will help insulate it," she said. "If you keep your milk in the door, for example, it's being exposed to the 'danger zone' each time you open the door."

Most vegetable drawers have adjustable humidity controls. Vegetables require higher humidity, but fruit does not.

Fruit and vegetables should be stored separately, if possible. Naturally-produced ethylene gas from fruit like apples, pears and peaches can prematurely spoil vegetables like broccoli, asparagus, cucumbers and lettuce. If there's only one produce drawer available, dedicate that to ethylene-sensitive vegetables and store the fruit on a shelf.

When bringing home produce from the grocery store, proper storage helps keep it fresh. Do not wash whole fruits or vegetables before storing them. Excess moisture can cause wilting or rot to set in. If the produce has visible dirt on the surface or is excessively dirty, rinse it and dry off very well before storing.

"If the lettuce or whatever produce you buy is prepackaged, it's best to leave it in that package until you're ready to use it," Dittmar said. "The more you handle food and move it around, the more you risk cross-contamination."

Finally, organize condiments in the door according to type and use. For example, group mayonnaise, mustard and other sandwich spreads together for easy access when making lunch and put all the sundae toppings on the same shelf.

Store it all safely

Generally, cooked food will last three to four days in the fridge. Ground meat and poultry should be cooked within one to two days, and fish or seafood should ideally be cooked the day it's brought home.

Vegetables will last about a week, while fruit may keep a bit longer depending on the type. Condiments may not have expiration dates, but for optimal freshness and flavor, Dittmar recommends taking stock a few times a year and tossing condiments that have an off smell, texture or color.

A general recommendation is to consume any homemade canned product within one month of opening, Dittmar said.

For a guide to know how long it's safe to keep different foods, visit www.foodsafety.gov/keep-food-safe/foodkeeper-app. There is also a mobile app available for Apple and Android products.

For more information on refrigeration and food safety, visit www.fsis.usda.gov/shared/PDF/Refrigeration_and_Food_Safety.pdf.

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TFB announces new IDX member benefit

By Julie Tomascik
Editor

Identity theft is the fastest growing crime in the United States. Statistics show an individual's identity is stolen every two seconds.

With criminals targeting local retailers, social media and everything in between, it can feel like your data is no longer personal. And identity theft can have devastating effects on the victims.

But Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) members have access to identity protection, credit monitoring and help recovering from a credit breach and identity theft with IDX, a new member benefit.

"A connection with IDX is a true testament to Texas Farm Bureau's commitment to provide our members with quality benefits," said Whitney Richter, marketing coordinator for TFB's



The Privacy Platform

member benefits program. "With the alarming statistics of identity theft in the United States and abroad, Texas Farm Bureau is proud to collaborate with IDX to offer our members this level of identity protection."

TFB members save more than 50 percent off the retail cost of the IDX Identity Protection – Premier Plan.

The premier plan includes IDX monitoring, privacy protection

and complete identity recovery.

IDX monitoring covers tri-bureau credit monitoring, CyberScan™ dark web monitoring, social security number trace, court records, payday loans and instant inquiry alerts, among others.

The privacy protection includes credit lock, lost wallet protection, password detective and SocialSentry™ social media protection.

IDX's Care team can act on members' behalf with limited power of attorney to help with identity recovery.

Members can choose between the premier plan for an individual at \$9.95 per month and for families at \$17.95 per month.

"This year has posed many uncertainties for Texans, and it's our goal to provide a member benefit, like IDX, that offers peace of mind and security," Richter said.

Take advantage of the member benefit by visiting www.idx.us/txfb.

In addition to the IDX program, TFB members also can take advantage of savings with more than 60 member exclusive discounts.

For a complete list of benefits and services available for TFB members, visit <https://texasfarmbureau.org/memberbenefits>.



CARING FOR AGING PETS

By Jennifer Dorsett
Field Editor

Pets are a wonderful addition to many Texan households, but sadly, pets' expected lifespans are not quite the same as those of their human companions.

There are steps pet owners can take to ensure pets age comfortably, according to Dr. Bob Judd, DVM, who has a mixed animal practice in Hewitt.

It all begins with disease prevention. Aging pets tend to suffer from obesity, arthritis and dental disease, but he noted obesity and dental disease are both easily avoidable with proper care.

"Disease prevention will go a long way in extending a pet's lifespan," Judd said. "There are three main types of disease we see over and over in older pets, but the good news is, they're mostly preventable."

Overweight animals tend to have a lower quality of life and suffer from increased rates of arthritis.

"Obesity is the number-one thing, by far, that limits pets' lives. That's cats, that's dogs, that's horses," Judd said. "About 75 percent of the dogs that come into our practice are overweight, 40 percent of the horses we see are overweight, and probably 50 percent of the cats we see are overweight. That limits everything. Just like people, they're going to develop arthritis as they get older. The heavier they are, the more they have to carry, and they can't get around."

It's a self-perpetuating cycle. Obesity increases arthritis, which leads to decreased mobility. But exercise to reduce weight is limited because of the decreased mobility, and obesity tends to in-

crease, Judd said.

"There was a study done in Labrador Retrievers many years ago that showed that dogs of normal weight would live two years longer than dogs that were overweight. That's pretty significant. Two years longer in a dog—that's about 15 percent more time with that animal," he said.

If a pet's weight is kept under control throughout the earlier years, Judd noted arthritis is likely to develop later than in an overweight pet. Still, it is a common disease among pets of advanced age.

"There are some things we can do to help them with pain and inflammation and help them lead a better-quality life," Judd said. "We have a lot of good medications for that, and there are some good products that we can really help with to manage arthritis."

The third most-common disease Judd sees in older pets is dental disease.

"Probably 80 percent of the dogs that come into our practice have some form of dental disease," he said. "We know there's a lot of teeth problems, and these dogs are in pain, even though they don't show it like people with dental disease do. Just because a dog is eating, doesn't mean they're not having pain in their mouths."

It's not just dogs, either. Judd said cats frequently experience tooth resorption, a disease in which the dentin in a tooth erodes and becomes irreparably destroyed, leaving exposed nerve endings in the cat's mouth.

It's a painful condition that can affect up to 75 percent of cats 5 years of age or older, according to the [Cornell University College of Medicine](https://www.cornell.edu/vetcollege/). The tooth must be



extracted to free the animal from pain, Judd said.

Aging horses are also prone to a variety of dental disorders, including lost teeth, sharp or broken teeth, worn-down teeth and various infections, Judd said.

He noted dental disease often has been present for many years before pet owners bring their animal to the vet.

Many times, the extraction of multiple teeth is the only option left for senior animals, which can be risky depending on the animal's overall health.

"At 10 or 12 years, small dogs who have more dental disease also have bad hearts. When they come in, they have severe dental disease, but they also have a really bad heart murmur," Judd said. "We're reluctant or concerned about anesthetizing him because we're afraid that he might not make it out of the procedure. What do you do? There's really nothing we can do. You can put them on antibiotics for 10 days out of every month. Some of those dogs, we can't do anything else. That helps fight the infection, but you're never going to get

rid of the problem."

Judd stressed that old age is not a disease in and of itself. As pets age, they may be less active, but there are certain signs to watch for that may indicate underlying disease.

Trouble standing, a wobbling gait, breathing heavily, changes in behavior such as urinating inside the house or a cat not using the litterbox, not drinking or eating normally and coughing excessively are signs there may be something going on with your pet.

"Old age is a condition, but it's not a disease," Judd said. "If the dog is not moving around, it's not old age, it's arthritis. There's a disease causing those signs, not just age. It makes a big difference if you diagnose that. There are a lot of things that we can do to increase their quality of life as they age."

Judd hosts a daily segment on the Texas Farm Bureau Radio Network discussing the latest in veterinary news, livestock and pet care and other relevant topics. You can find his show at <https://texasfarmbureau.org/radio/>.



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RUMBAUGH EXCELS IN AGRICULTURE, CAREER

By Jennifer Dorset
Field Editor

Jessica Rumbaugh wants people to understand the true value of rural land ownership.

It's a message she hopes will help property owners keep their land in agricultural production for as many years as possible, preserving a way of life that is quickly becoming less common.

"As the broker and owner of Texas Land and Home Real Estate, my business model is very education-centered, and I work hard to encourage people to view farm and ranch properties as an investment asset rather than only looking at that land for future development for buildings," she said. "We're losing a staggering amount of farmland annually across the country, and while I recognize in my role in real estate that development and population growth is inevitable, I try to share with buyers why agriculture is so important, why it's such a necessary and vital resource."

Her family also has a cow-calf operation, raising grassfed beef

for direct-to-consumer sales.

Rumbaugh personally delivers most of the beef she sells to people in Houston, Austin and everywhere in between.

While she's been successful in real estate and beef production, it's not a career path she initially saw herself taking.

"My roots run deep in agriculture. Both of my grandfathers are from this area, where I've grown up, as well. I worked in Houston and didn't really like that, so we came back here to get back into agriculture," Rumbaugh said.

Once home in Wharton County, she realized agricultural advocacy was more important than ever.

"Now, I'm a fourth-generation farmer and rancher, and I think it's easy in agriculture to just focus on your day-to-day operation and what's right in front of you, like keeping plants alive or livestock alive," she said. "But we have to look beyond that and realize that we have to be involved in leadership, in advocacy and talking to legislators and engaging the public, because it's so much more than just a production operation. We really have

to advocate, because there are just so many people who don't understand why we do what we do."

Being a vocal advocate and leader in her industry is another way of carrying on family traditions.

"I feel like I'm following in the footsteps of my grandfather, who was a trailblazer and leader in this area as far as what he did and all the boards he started and all the things he helped to found here," she said.

Connecting buyers with contacts to help manage agricultural tax exemptions and providing resources to encourage them to keep their land in production gives her a sense of purpose.

Farm Bureau has been a valuable tool in helping her develop those connections and cultivating strong relationships.

"My training and experiences through Farm Bureau have really helped me connect to people and help them learn more about what they can expand that piece of property into," she said. "My goal is to encourage and educate urban clients to invest in land ownership in rural areas, and in turn, to help keep that rural land in use—

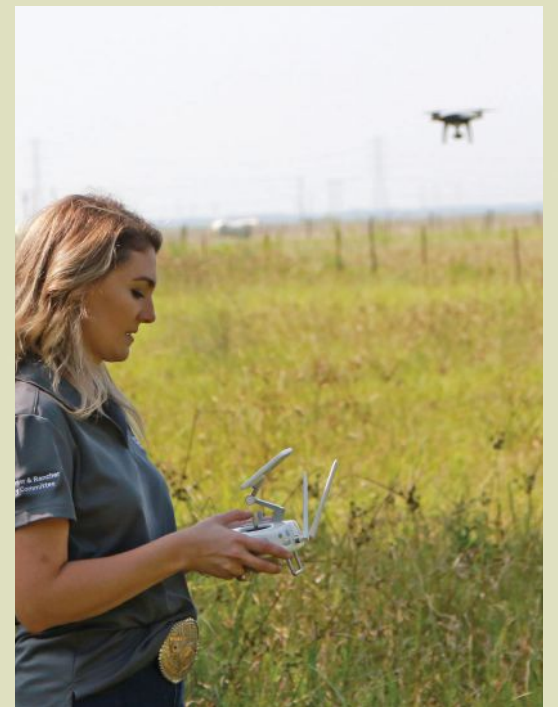
whether for agricultural use or wildlife habitat."

And she hopes her beef business helps urban residents better understand agriculture, too.

"It was through our contacts in the city, both from our old corporate sales jobs and then even through my real estate business, where people said 'Hey, can we buy some beef from you?'" Rumbaugh said. "Now, I interact with so many people who have probably never talked to someone who does anything in agriculture. They get to see that agriculture is not some huge, corporate-run business. It's people like me, just a young mom sometimes hauling her kids while dropping off my beef."

She and her husband, Ben, have two kids. She wants their children to learn from her and be passionate about agriculture and be a voice for farmers and ranchers.

"We definitely want our kids to learn that hard work pays off. We want them to learn that every day the animals rely on you, people rely on you," she said. "They see us work hard, and that's extremely important."



Artisan Bread

INGREDIENTS

- 3 c. all-purpose flour**
- 1 tbsp. coarse sea salt**
- 1 tbsp. sugar**
- ½ tsp. dry active yeast**
- 1 ½ c. warm water (approximately 110 degrees)**

INSTRUCTIONS

- Combine dry ingredients in a large bowl.
- Pour in warm water and mix well to combine.
- Cover with cling wrap and let rise in a warm place for between 10 to 24 hours.
- When you are ready to bake the bread, preheat the oven to 450 degrees with the dutch oven in the oven to warm.
- Pour the dough onto a flour surface and form into a ball.
- Place the dough over the parchment-lined dutch oven and cover with lid.
- Bake for 30 minutes.
- Remove the lid and bake for an additional 5 minutes to make it golden brown.
- Serve warm.

Prep time: 24 hours

Baking time: 40 minutes

Makes 1 loaf





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Whitworth is #stillranching in Rusk County

**By Jennifer Dorsett
Field Editor**

East Texas rancher Bennie Whitworth strayed from the herd for several years, but his love for the land and cattle called him back home.

"I taught agricultural science for 18 years, but I kept building my ranching operation and came home to ranch fulltime six years ago," Whitworth said. "I was always working to get back here. I grew up in Nacogdoches, and now I live one county over in Henderson, which is in Rusk County."

Whitworth and his wife, Emily, run a 1,000-head commercial cow-calf operation, do custom hay baling, custom spraying and take care of cattle from other ranches.

The Whitworths also often buy stocker cattle, which are young, weaned steers and heifers. These animals are purchased while they're young, raised on grass or other forage until they're heavier, then sold.

The COVID-19 pandemic dealt the beef industry a heavy blow last spring and early summer. Although processing plants are operating at normal capacity now, cattle prices remain depressed, an issue that's concerning to Whitworth and other ranchers.

"Aside from market fluctuations

and depressed markets, we saw a lot of issues back in the spring having difficulty with processing plants being backed up. Meat prices were high in the store, but producer prices were really depressed. That created some cash flow issues for us here at home," Whitworth said. "I thought it kind of interesting that a lot of the people not in the industry would say, 'Boy, I bet y'all are getting rich right now,' and I'd have to try to explain how that wasn't the case at all—exactly the opposite, actually."

And the pandemic impacted Whitworth indirectly, too. Several of his customers whose cattle he cares for were heavily tied to the oil and gas industry. When that market suffered, it took their cattle herds with it.

"On the custom care side of the operation, we had several customers that had to disperse their herds, which depleted our cattle inventory. That's an aspect of our ranch that's been included to help with cash flow," Whitworth said. "We get paid a certain amount per head per month, so it created a lot of issues in juggling budgets, equipment payments, land notes and all the factors that come along with that."

Although losing many of his

customers was unexpected, Whitworth has picked up a new customer. That's helped stabilize his situation.

But challenges still remain for the Rusk County Farm Bureau member.

During this time of year, he would normally sell about half of his calf crop. But with cattle prices still low, Whitworth only sold what he had to in order to pay some bills.

"We have loan payments and things of that nature structured around those times of year when we sell animals, but with the markets depressed, we only sold enough to make things work for now. We hope and pray for better times soon," he said.

Many ranchers have tried selling their own beef by using smaller and local meat processors, but those smaller processors are overwhelmed.

"I talked to the slaughterhouse that does our personal stuff, and they're booking for July 2021 right now," he said. "There's a lot of backlog there, and if that calf was ready for slaughter in April, you're going to have three more months that you have feed and input costs, as well as the added risk that something will go wrong during that time like an accident or mortality."

But it's not all bad news.

Timely rains last summer proved beneficial to Whitworth's hay crop, which will help with cash flow.

"We actually had a really good summer for hay, probably one of the best ones we've had in several years. We grew a lot of forage and produced a lot of hay, so that's a positive aspect for the ranch," Whitworth said. "We had an excess of hay to market and sell, which brings in a little extra revenue, and there's still enough left over to feed our cattle."

Although cattle prices have fallen, at least most of his input costs have stayed the same.

Despite the challenges of 2020 and previous years, Whitworth has no plans to throw in the towel. He'll keep ranching as long as he can, and he hopes someday to pass the family business on to his son, Baxter.

"For a long, long time—basically since the beginning—farmers and ranchers have helped build this country. They made it the country that it is, and we'll continue to push forward to try to make a living and provide the world with food," he said. "But every year it seems like it gets a little tougher and a little harder. Groups like Texas Farm Bureau are essential to give us the voice we need to move forward."



Photos courtesy Bennie Whitworth

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