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Texas Agriculture

December 4, 2020

Published by Texas Farm Bureau for commercial farmers and ranchers



Rising Above

Baldree uses farm work ethic
on Texas A&M football team

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Americans trust farmers, have positive view of sustainability practices

A new national survey should give Texas farmers and ranchers a sense of public confidence.

It appears the public understands that we're committed to protecting the soil, air and water.

A majority of U.S. adults have a positive view of farmers' sustainability practices, and an overwhelming majority trust farmers, according to a new national public opinion poll from the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF).

The survey of 2,200 U.S. adults found that more than half (58 percent) rate the sustainability practices of U.S. farmers positively, with broad agreement from a majority of adults across demographic groups.

Nearly nine in 10 adults (88 percent) trust farmers, a 4 percent increase from AFBF's June 2020 polling, which is evidence the public recognized that food supply chain challenges brought on by the pandemic were not within the control of farmers and ranchers.

The survey also explored public attitudes about the environmental sustainability achievements of farmers and ranchers, as well as future direction to advance climate-smart farming. Overall, the public agrees

farmers shouldn't be expected to bear the financial burden alone.

More than four in five adults (84 percent) say environmental sustainability and economic sustainability are both important for farmers, and most adults say both are very important. More than four in five adults also say feeding the world (84 percent) and farmers passing farms on to future generations (83 percent) are important.

Support for farmers' sustainability efforts swelled when government data was shared about achievements.

More than eight in 10 Americans (81 percent) were impressed when they learned that, according to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and U.S. Department of Agriculture, farmers have put 140 million acres in conservation programs, more than doubled the amount of renewable energy sources they use and nearly tripled the amount of food grown in the last 70 years with the same or fewer resources.

Looking to the future, the survey explores how Americans think sustainability efforts on farms and ranches should be funded. Seventy

percent of adults say government incentives to encourage farmers to adopt additional sustainable agricultural practices would be effective. More than three-quarters of adults believe it is important for the government to fund science-based research (76 percent) and improve infrastructure (78 percent) to support agriculture.

At a time when some corporations are making sustainability commitments that include or impact agricultural production, a bipartisan majority of adults (62 percent) say corporations should compensate farmers for the additional cost of implementing environmental practices to help achieve sustainability goals.

The survey also revealed there is still work to be done to increase

awareness of agriculture's comparatively small contribution to greenhouse gas emissions in the U.S.

More than four in five adults (84 percent) were not able to correctly identify agriculture's impact. On a brighter note, nearly half of the adults (45 percent) correctly ranked agriculture as the smallest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions by economic sector.

According to the latest EPA data, agriculture accounts for 10 percent of total U.S. emissions, far less than the transportation, electricity production, commercial and residential, and industry sectors.

The survey demonstrates that Americans are impressed by advancements in climate-smart farming. That should give all of us confidence going forward.



By Russell Boening
President

American Farm Bureau Federation

poll shows

88% of Americans trust farmers

and

84% of adults believe environmental sustainability and economic sustainability are both important for farmers



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December 4, 2020 Vol. 36, No. 6

ADVERTISING: **Kelly Bogard**, Advertising Manager, (254) 751-2420; **J.L. Farmakis** (Representative for outside Texas), New Canaan, CT (203) 966-1746.

TEXAS AGRICULTURE is published 12 times a year by Texas Farm Bureau, 7420 Fish Pond Road, Waco, Texas 76710, (254) 772-3030. Changes of address may be sent to TEXAS AGRICULTURE, Box 2689, Waco, Texas 76702-2689.

Subscription price to Farm Bureau members is included in annual membership dues.

All advertising is subject to publisher's approval. Texas Agriculture reserves the right to reject any ad.

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Texas Table Top blog: tabletop.texasfarmbureau.org

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AGRICURRENTS

Texas Farm Bureau announces new IDX benefit

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 collaboration 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 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 save with more than 60 member discounts.

For a complete list of benefits and services, visit texasfarmbureau.org/memberbenefits.

EU imposes tariffs on U.S. goods

In the latest move in a long-running dispute over the subsidization of aircraft production, the European Union (EU) announced it will impose tariffs on nearly \$4 billion of U.S. aircraft, agricultural and industrial goods.

As the "tip of the spear" in trade disputes, U.S. farm and ranch goods and products are often first on the list in retaliatory tariffs, regardless of the type of goods and services directly related to the dispute.

The list of tariff codes has two different tiers. The first tier is limited to certain types of civilian aircraft at a rate of 15 percent, and the second tier applies to a range of food, agricultural and industrial goods at a rate of 25 percent.

Tariffs are skewed toward processed food and agricultural goods rather than bulk agricultural commodities.

The most-impacted food and agricultural goods are alcohol, tobacco and cotton.

Following the top three is oilseeds, oils and fats, showing the tariff list takes aim at ingredients used in food manufacturing over raw agricultural commodities.

When looking at the most recent EU import data, the targeted goods in food and agriculture amounted to nearly \$1.4 billion in 2019.

The top 10 products affected are: rum, flue-cured tobacco, fresh sweet potatoes, peanuts, sauces and preparations, vegetable saps and extracts, wheat and meslin, air-cured tobacco, frozen Pacific salmon fillets and frozen scallops.

For more information on the tariffs, visit the American Farm Bureau's Market Intel report at fb.org/market-intel.

Lamar CFB contributes to volunteer fire departments

When Lamar County Farm Bureau (CFB) found itself with some extra funds in the budget at the end of the fiscal year, the board members knew just what to do with the money.

"We had some extra funds since we didn't hold our county convention this year, and the volunteer fire departments (VFDs) couldn't hold their usual fundraisers because of COVID-19. So, we tried to help them out a little bit," Lamar CFB President Mike Winters said.

Despite a countywide population of nearly 50,000, Paris is the only city large enough to fund and staff a fire station.

"It's a pretty good-sized county, so we have a lot of VFDs—19 to be exact," Winters said. "When we have grass fires, fires in rural housing, stuff like that, it's usually up to the VFDs to take care of it."

Like most VFDs across Texas, those in Lamar County are funded



through a combination of sources but rely heavily on fundraisers and donations to cover operational costs and purchase new equipment.

Normal community fundraising activities were severely limited by the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

So, Lamar CFB donated \$1,000 to each VFD in the county for a total donation of \$19,000. The funds were

presented in November to Lamar County Volunteer Firefighters Association President Roger Bussell, who will distribute the funds equally between all county VFDs.

"We were trying to think of ways to help the county, and we figured this is the best way we can help," Winters said. "We're giving back to the community that supports us."



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County Farm Bureaus continue creative community outreach

By Jennifer Dorsett
Field Editor

County Farm Bureaus (CFBs) across Texas continue to make connections, build relationships and strengthen agricultural awareness in their communities through a variety of events, workshops and pro-

grams.

This year, Anderson, Bowie, Hale and Wharton CFBs were recognized by Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) for their outreach efforts in the state County Activities of Excellence (CAE) award program.

“County Farm Bureaus undertake

outreach projects and collaborate with other local organizations on various events throughout each year. Those interactions are important because farmers and ranchers are able to interact with local consumers, neighbors and community leaders,” TFB President Russell Boening said.

“We’re proud of the work our county leaders do in their communities to increase agricultural awareness, and we’re proud to recognize these four counties for their creative efforts.”

Each county chose a different approach to connect with their community over agriculture.

Anderson County Farm Bureau

Inspiring and involving the next generation of agricultural leaders is one of Anderson CFB’s goals. To help achieve that goal, the county organization created an internship opportunity that tasked a high school student to serve as a youth ambassador for the CFB board of directors.

A subcommittee developed objectives and prerequisites for the internship. Requirements to be the youth ambassador included previously attending TFB’s Youth Leadership Conference and participating in the Free Enterprise Speech Contest.

Sarah Reed, a high school senior, met those requirements and was selected as the first youth ambassador by a panel of judges.

“Through programming efforts, planning meetings, policy discus-

sions and attending monthly meetings, Sarah saw firsthand exactly how TFB and Anderson CFB represents Texas agriculture,” Ted Britton, Anderson CFB president, said.

Reed attended events, serving as a photographer and documenting activities Anderson CFB was involved in throughout the year.

“As the youth ambassador, I shadowed the board,” Reed said. “I learned about Anderson CFB and TFB. I learned about the policy making process, and I saw the passion the board of directors had for interacting with our communities to share the importance of agriculture. I also learned more about how a board of directors operates, and that will help me in college and my future career.”



Anderson County Farm Bureau created a youth ambassador position to help inspire and involve the next generation of agricultural leaders in the local area. Sarah Reed served as the county’s first ambassador this year.

At the end of the internship, Reed delivered a verbal report to the board highlighting her experiences and the knowledge she gained about agriculture and Farm Bureau.

“Youth are our future of Anderson

CFB and TFB,” Britton said. “Involving students in what we do is one of the best ways to teach them about Farm Bureau and production agriculture. Sarah did a great job as our intern and representing our county.”

Bowie County Farm Bureau

Bowie CFB strengthened their ties with local young farmers and ranchers to boost participation in Young Farmer and Rancher (YF&R) programs.

“I’ve been on the board for 10-12 years, and we’ve never aggressively pursued young farmers and ranchers,” Jimmy Anderson, Bowie CFB board member, said. “We decided to hit the road, shake some bushes and find some more young farmers for our programs.”

To meet their goal, each board member committed to forming and strengthening personal relationships with young farmers and ranchers in the county who were not already engaged in Farm Bureau.

The board members followed up

by preparing and hosting a YF&R catfish dinner, where they and TFB staff discussed the various opportunities and benefits provided through involvement in YF&R programs.

It was also a time of fellowship and information exchange, Anderson noted.

“Our country president, Gaylon Tidwell, is a row crop farmer,” he said. “They were picking Gaylon’s brain to see what he and other farmers are doing, so we got them together and they were able to share more about farming practices. It helped them not only learn more about Farm Bureau, but they learned from each other, too.”

After the event, board members followed up with the young individu-



Bowie County Farm Bureau increased engagement and promotion of Farm Bureau to young farmers and ranchers in the area. The county organization also held a dinner for the young farmers to interact with the board of directors.

als to encourage them to become involved in Bowie CFB and YF&R program activities.

“Several promising young leaders surfaced, and we hope some of these

may lead Bowie CFB in the future,” Anderson said. “We broke ground with these young people, and we’re going to keep after them to develop those relationships.”

Hale County Farm Bureau

Hale CFB hosted 29 Texas 4-H members on a cucumber farm tour so they could learn more about West Texas agriculture and pickle production.

During a meet-and-greet lunch in Plainview, small groups of four to six students participating in the Texas 4-H Youth Agricultural Lifetime Leadership (Y.A.L.L.) experience engaged with Hale CFB leaders. They discussed regional geography, common local crops and other agricultural topics.

The youth visited Hale CFB Secretary-Treasurer Bryan Curry's cucumber farm to learn more about the area's specialty crops and pickle production.

Bobby Byrd, a Hale CFB board member, rode the bus from Plainview to Curry's farm, fielding ques-

tions from students along the way.

"One of the things that struck me and was encouraging to me is that we have young people who still understand agriculture," Byrd said. "Many of them were from South Texas, so they were a little out of their comfort zone as far as what we were growing and how, but they had some really good questions prepared. I think they left with a really good understanding of production and challenges we face in our area like climate and limited water access."

According to 4-H leaders, the experience was beneficial in strengthening agricultural knowledge and awareness in children and adults alike.

"We're supposed to do this again next year. They were so impressed, they wanted to come back," Byrd



Nearly 30 Texas 4-H members toured a cucumber farm as part of the Texas 4-H Youth Agricultural Lifetime Leadership program. They interacted with Hale County Farm Bureau leaders on the tour to learn more about production agriculture.

said. "We like to do events like these because we realize that agriculture is getting further and further re-

moved from everyday life, and we want people to know what we do and why we do it."

Wharton County Farm Bureau

After the coronavirus pandemic forced the cancelation of the annual county stock show and fair, Wharton CFB hosted a virtual bucket calf show so young children could still show the hard work that went into raising their animals.

The idea was sparked during the county's first-ever virtual board meeting, said Wharton CFB board member Jessica Rumbaugh.

"This was very early in the pandemic, and the bucket calf show was one of the first special events to get cut when the county was planning on still hosting a modified youth stock show," Rumbaugh said. "But the kids that aren't of 4-H age yet, the 5- to 8-year-olds, had already put in all this work for several months, and

it was going to just disappear overnight. So, we said 'Hey, we're having a virtual board meeting. What if we do a virtual calf show?'"

Children were encouraged to create and submit video entries for the event showing the daily feeding and care that goes into raising the calves.

Two classifications for the virtual show were created by Wharton CFB: a junior division for children ages five and six and a senior division for seven- to eight-year-olds.

The Wharton CFB board of directors judged the entries and awarded participants prizes for various categories, including showmanship and interview skills. A "people's choice" category was created to encourage audience participation on social



Although the coronavirus pandemic canceled the county bucket calf show, Wharton County Farm Bureau leaders stepped up and hosted a virtual show for the young exhibitors. They also gave away more than \$1,000 in prizes.

media.

More than \$1,000 in prizes were

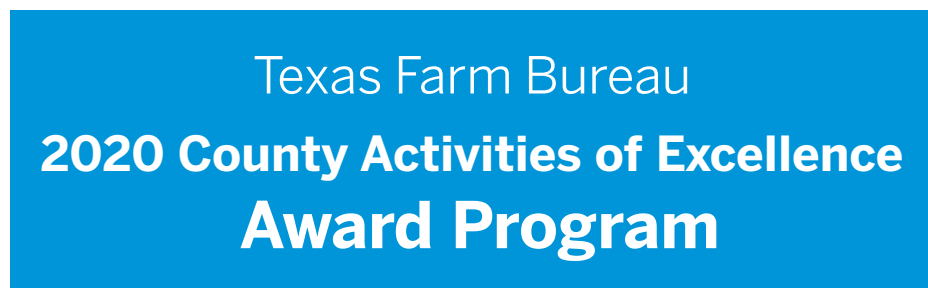
distributed to the participants of the virtual show.

Program Summary

The CAE awards recognize unique, volunteer-driven programming at the local level. The CAE program categorizes county activities into the following areas: education and ag promotion, member services, public relations and

information, leadership development and policy implementation.

For more information about CAE awards and participation, contact Charles Benton, TFB director of Field Operations, at cbenton@txfb.org.



TFB garden grants help schools, programs grow ag literacy

By Julie Tomascik
Editor

Texas Farm Bureau named the recipients of the Learning from the Ground Up garden grants for 2021.

Grants were awarded to schools and educational programs across the Lone Star State for their garden projects to increase agricultural literacy and awareness.

Although the ongoing coronavirus pandemic has altered classroom instruction, schools and educational programs can bring agriculture to life in creative ways with the help of the garden grants.

“Food production and learning can happen anywhere, whether students are in the classroom or learning from a distance,” Jordan Walker, TFB director of Educational Outreach, said. “The hands-on experiences from the selected projects help students better understand agriculture and food production and how that connects to their everyday life.”

Projects include establishing or improving school gardens, raised beds, greenhouses and outdoor classrooms that provide students with hands-on, experiential learning about agriculture and food production.

The next application process will

open in fall 2021.

For more information about gar-

den grants, other educational opportunities and Ag in the Classroom

materials, visit texasfarmbureau.org/aitc or email edoutreach@txfb.org.

Garden Grant recipients for 2021 include the following:

Alpine Christian School

Anson Jones Middle School

Avalon School

Blanco Elementary School

Brady Elementary

Channing ISD

Chillicothe High School

Colonial Hills United Methodist School

Cotton Center Elementary

Crestview Elementary School

Dodd Elementary

Dr. John Folks Middle School

Elkhart Intermediate

Evant HS

First Baptist Academy

Full Armor Christian Academy

Fulton 3-5 Learning Center

Grace Christian Academy

Grapeland High School

Incarinate Word Academy

James Reese Career and Technical Center

Jerry Knight STEM Academy

John Paul Stevens High School

Liberty Hill Junior High School

Lindale High School

Llano Junior High School

Mildred Junior High School

Miss May Vernon Elementary

Morton Ranch High School

Nolan Catholic High School

Oakwood Elementary

PISD High School

Sam Rayburn High School

South Elementary

St. Anthony Catholic School

St. Mary's Catholic School

Stockton Junior High School

Stonewall Elementary School

Tom Bean Middle School

Washington Early Childhood

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Coalition asks for intervention in FCC ruling

The American Farm Bureau Federation and dozens of other organizations are calling on lawmakers to help protect the satellite communications and GPS services that millions of Americans rely on.

This spring, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) granted a petition filed by Ligado to provide 5G services.

Ligado's planned use of its spectrum is so near bands used by GPS, it could diminish the reception capability of GPS devices. This would impact farmers and ranchers who rely on precision agriculture technology and GPS to be more efficient and economical. It would also put at risk GPS services used by the military and national defense agencies, aviation safety agencies, mapping applications and others.

"The proposed Ligado network would disrupt the reliability of satellite communications services and the many critical applications that rely upon GPS, which has direct implications for safety-of-life in commercial aviation operations, precision farming and irrigation management that have revolutionized the agriculture economy, autonomous ground and air vehicles that will bring a new generation of transportation, precise and actionable weather data that can predict hurricanes and other life-threatening natural events, and many other applications," the groups said in a letter to the U.S. Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee.

The groups are asking lawmakers to work with FCC to set aside the flawed Ligado order in favor of a process that is responsive to the concerns of the broad cross-section of L-band operators and users.

The 60-plus organizations that signed the letter represent the aviation, aerospace, agriculture, GPS, ground transportation, mapping, marine, metrological, public safety, satellite communications and surveying industries and professions.



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Beef Loving Texans names Eddie Jackson as chief recipe officer

Beef Loving Texans, the consumer-facing brand of the Texas Beef Council, announced Eddie Jackson, Food Network chef and former NFL star, as the newest addition to its team.

Jackson will serve as the brand's chief recipe officer, developing unique, timely recipes for Beef Loving Texans and partnering as an ambassador for the brand. This is the first-ever partnership of its kind for Beef Loving Texans, launching just in time for the holiday season.

"We know some of life's greatest memories are made over a delicious meal. That's why we've teamed up with Eddie Jackson as our new chief recipe officer to help bring even more tasty beef dishes to the table," Rachel Parsons Chou, Beef Loving Texans' director of Consumer Marketing, said.

Jackson joined the Beef Loving Texans team in November.

"Our goal at the Texas Beef Council is to help producers and the en-

tire Texas beef industry by getting beef on more dinner plates," said Jason Bagley, vice president of Beef Resources for the Texas Beef Council. "Having a well-known personality like Eddie team up with our Beef Loving Texans brand is a great way to expand beef's appeal to an even broader audience and encourage more consumers to work beef into their daily meal plans."

Jackson is the host of two popular food reality television shows—the Food Network's *Christmas Cookie Challenge* and Cooking Channel's *Yum & Yummer*.

Jackson is known for participating as a contestant on season 4 of the reality cooking competition show *MasterChef*, winning the eleventh season of the Food Network series *Food Network Star* and hosting his own Food Network cooking competition series, *BBQ Blitz*.

He also hosted the Food Network cooking competition series *Kids BBQ Championship*.

He is a former NFL athlete and recently released *Game Day Eats*, a cookbook full of recipes to take your tailgate to the next level from home.

"I've had a lot of jobs, and while the title of chief recipe officer is a new one for me, I'm really excited about it," Jackson said. "I love cooking with beef, whether that's in the kitchen or on my eight-foot backyard smoker, so this felt like a natural partnership. I can't wait to get started."

To learn more about Jackson's role as chief recipe officer, visit beeflovingtexans.com/chief-recipe-officer.

Beef Loving Texans is Texas Beef Council's consumer-facing brand created to share unique recipes, stories,



Eddie Jackson is the chief recipe officer for Beef Loving Texans. Courtesy photo.

cooking and shopping tips and nutrition information.

TFB announces new Feeding the Need co-op contribution program

Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) announced the Feeding the Need co-op contribution program with county Farm Bureaus to assist charitable organizations designed to help those in need this holiday season.

Many entities in local communities are in need of assistance due to extended demand of their services during the pandemic.

While food-related donations should be a priority, the program can be used for other causes deemed worthy by a county Farm Bureau board of directors.

TFB will match a county Farm Bureau donation of up to \$1,000 for any qualified donation.

The county Farm Bureau would pay the total determined amount, and TFB would then reimburse one-half of the total, up to \$1,000.

"As the effects of COVID-19 linger across our nation and state, charitable organizations are being stretched to the limit. The need for assistance has never been greater, nor has our opportunity to make an impact," TFB President Russell Boening said in announcing the program. "As we near the holiday season, there are so many in our local communities who

are in need. In addition, many of the organizations that are designed to provide assistance are having difficulty due to increased demand and lack of funds."

Boening said many of these organizations have had to cancel fundraising activities that are a large part of their yearly budget.

The success of the Farm Bureau Feeding Texas co-op contribution program earlier this year provided momentum for the creation of the new effort.

"This program once again puts the decision of how best to make an impact in the hands of our county Farm Bureaus," Boening said. "We all hope and pray for better times ahead. In the meantime, if we work together, perhaps we can make the holiday season a little brighter for those in need."

The program is in effect for expenditures incurred from Sept. 1, 2020, up until and including Dec. 31, 2020, or until budgeted funds are exhausted.

For more information about the Feeding the Need co-op contribution program, contact your county Farm Bureau office.

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Followill wins TFB Collegiate Discussion Meet

By Jennifer Dorsett
Field Editor

Going virtual didn't stop college students from diving into the Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) Collegiate Discussion Meet. And one enterprising young member brought home the top prize for her thoughtful dialogue on the issues faced by rural Americans, farmers and ranchers.

Hannah Followill of Texas A&M University was named the winner of this year's contest.

The annual contest, which is hosted by TFB's Young Farmer & Rancher (YF&R) Advisory Committee, helps college students better understand issues facing all sectors of agriculture—farmers, ranchers, agribusinesses, the food supply chain and more.

It also helps collegiate contestants hone public speaking and problem-solving skills.

This year, Followill and 11 other college students from across the

state participated in a virtual competition, where recorded responses and live Zoom discussions were used to conduct the annual contest in a digital format.

"We had a great turnout for our first-ever virtual discussion meet," YF&R Advisory Committee Chair Jesse Wieners said. "The contestants did a great job at adapting to the new format and interacting with each other on Zoom."

Topics of discussion included rural broadband access, the need for tools and strategies farmers and ranchers can use to deal with natural disasters and the rising role of technology and "big data" in farming.

In the first two rounds, contestants submitted recorded individual responses to questions.

The top eight then participated in a live video discussion on Oct. 28. The four finalists were announced after that discussion round.

The four finalists included: Fol-

lowill, a senior at Texas A&M; Harrison Coker, a junior at Texas A&M; Zachary Lyman, a freshman at Schreiner University; and Michael Weinstein, a sophomore at Texas A&M.

The following day, the final four contestants discussed solutions to enhance the current farm economy and help reverse the decline in rural populations.

Participants were scored based on their speaking skills, effective problem solving and cooperative communication with other contestants.

"I love to learn more about these topics, the issues that impact agriculture and rural Texans, so this was a fun opportunity for me," Followill said. "It was nerve-racking, yet so exciting all at once. I've never done any type of debate event, so it was very new to me. But I really enjoy talking about those issues, so I thought, 'Why not go for it?' and somehow I won."

Followill, who grew up in Houston, is studying agribusiness at Texas A&M with a minor in horticulture and Spanish.

Over the summer, she completed an internship in Washington, D.C. for U.S. Rep. Filemon Vela, an experience she said helped her understand the policymaking process and its effects on agriculture and rural communities.

Growing up in Houston, Followill wasn't exposed to agriculture until she attended a pony-themed birthday party when she was seven years old.

"From that day forward, my parents couldn't get me out of the barn. I rode horses competitively from the age of seven until I was 21. When I went into my senior year of high school, I wanted to figure out how to incorporate that aspect of my life that I was so passionate about into my career, and that's what led me to agribusiness," Followill said. "I'll graduate in 2021, and I'd like to continue learning more about policy and become more of a voice in agricultural policy and advocating for



Hannah Followill

farmers and ranchers."

As the top contestant, Followill took home a \$2,500 cash prize and a plaque. She will also represent Texas in the American Farm Bureau Federation's 2021 Collegiate Discussion Meet contest.

Coker, who is majoring in renewable natural resources at Texas A&M, was the runner-up.

He received a \$1,500 cash prize and a plaque.

The remaining finalists each received a \$750 cash prize and plaque.

The following participants also made the elite eight round preceding the final four: Trace Dodd, West Texas A&M University; Shelby Lain, West Texas A&M; Conner McKinzie, Texas Tech University; and Lyndee Yoder, West Texas A&M.

Other participants were Breanne Bailey, Tarleton State University; Alejandra Camarillo, West Texas A&M; and Patrick Herrera, Texas Tech.

Information on collegiate and young farmer and rancher activities available through TFB can be found online at texasfarmbureau.org/YFR.

Sign up for updates on YF&R contests, activities and other opportunities in the MyTFB membership portal. Login or create an account at my.texasfarmbureau.org, and select Contact Preferences under Account on the left-hand menu. From there, select Young Farmer & Rancher to receive emails throughout the year.

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AgriLife's Ranchers Leasing Workshop course now available online

By Jessica Domel
Multimedia Reporter

To help landowners and tenants ensure their rights are protected, the award-winning Ranchers Leasing Workshop is now available online.

Just like the in-person workshops, the online course explores the basics of a written lease agreement and the most common lease arrangements and payment structures, as well as possible terms in an agricultural lease relating to termination.

"It's focused on grazing and hunting leases primarily," Tiffany Dowell Lashmet, agricultural law specialist for Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, said. "We also touch a little bit on livestock leases, and we go pretty in-depth into some landowner liability issues. It's really focused on

the ranching community that's involved in those types of leases."

The course is designed to help both landowners and tenants protect themselves and their relationship by having a strong, clearly written lease.

"We really try to cover the gamut of it," Lashmet told the Texas Farm Bureau Radio Network. "We start with basic things like why it might be beneficial to do a lease, and why your leases should be in writing. We really spend a good chunk of time on some of the economics of it, how to structure a lease from an economic standpoint, what average lease rates are around the state and where you can find those resources."

The workshop dives into terms that should be included in the lease.

Those who take the online course



receive a PDF copy of the *Ranchers Agriculture Leasing Handbook* that corresponds with the course.

"It goes even more in-depth," Lashmet said. "One of the real benefits is there's a checklist for each type of lease and some corresponding sample lease language you could use to put a lease together yourself."

Lashmet said the handbook is a useful resource that landowners and tenants can consult when needed.

"Maybe right now you just have a grazing lease, and that's the chapter you've used, and you put it on the shelf. Later, if you decide to lease your hunting rights, you have that resource there," Lashmet said.

The cost for the online workshop is \$75.

The course can be found on AgriLifeLearn.tamu.edu. Click the "Business and Finance" section. The course is listed in the first row.

Students dig into vermiculture with TFB's Clover Cash grant program

By Jennifer Dorsett
Field Editor

Thanks to about 2,000 wriggling worms and Texas Farm Bureau's (TFB) Clover Cash grant program, students at Mildred Elementary School in Navarro County are digging into vermiculture, soil science and food production systems.

A group of seven students in third through fifth grade are feeding the worms food waste and paper products, which the worms then break down into a natural fertilizer that

can be used to grow more food.

Their teacher, Corrine Thompson, raised worms at her home and used the resulting vermicast, or worm castings, in her vegetable garden last summer with good results. She thought raising worms would be a great hands-on project for students to learn more about agricultural concepts such as food production and soil and plant health.

Her diligence in applying for grants like TFB's Clover Cash grant program made the project possible.

"We don't have lots of money to do lots of different things. So, the more grants I receive, the more the kids get to do," Thompson said. "When I saw the Clover Cash opportunity come up, I applied and had the kids do the research on what to feed worms, what kind of care they would need and how vermiculture works. After we received the grant, we bought 30-gallon plastic bins, compost, garden tools, rubber gloves—all of the incidentals we needed to get the project off the ground."

Now, each student is responsible for the care of his or her own bin of worms.

There is a cooler outside Thompson's classroom where faculty, staff and other students donate leftovers and food that would otherwise be thrown away. The students check the cooler each morning, categorize the contents and freeze any excess food for the weeks or days when they may be out of school.

"They feed the worms every Friday. We set out all the food from the week, and they go around and select what they want their worms to eat," Thompson said. "When they feed

them, the kids take notes about their appearance and size, whether they look healthy and active, and they document what the worms didn't eat from the week before. The kids try to give them greens, and they've discovered, just like themselves, the worms seem to prefer fruit more than vegetables. And they don't really like carrots, which the kids think is sort of funny."

Thompson noted worms can digest paper products, too. So, the *Corsicana Daily Sun* donates unsold newspapers to the project, which the kids then shred and use to supplement the worms' diets.

At the end of the school year, the students will hand out two-gallon bags of worm castings to community members for use in their gardens.

"It's been an amazing project, and the kids just love it," Thompson said. "They keep a journal and write about what they've learned, and we've been taking lots of pictures. We've already had so many people ask us to put their name on the list for when we start handing out the worm castings, so we think it's been a successful project."



Students at Mildred Elementary in Navarro County learn about vermiculture, soil science and food production with the help of a Texas Farm Bureau Clover Cash Grant. Courtesy photo.

Department of Labor stabilizes farmworker pay

By Jennifer Dorsett
Field Editor

The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) issued a final rule updating the methodology for determining the annual Adverse Effect Wage Rates (AEWRs) for the H-2A visa program.

The H-2A program allows farmers, ranchers and other agribusinesses the flexibility to hire foreign workers for seasonal or temporary agricultural labor or services.

Under H-2A, an AEWR is the minimum wage rate that immigrant agricultural workers' wages cannot be negotiated below. DOL uses AEWRs to certify the employment of foreign laborers does not adversely affect U.S. workers with similar jobs.

According to a DOL statement, the new rule improves consistency of AEWRs, provides stronger worker protections and establishes better stability for employers complying with these wage obligations.

H-2A rates were previously set according to the U.S. Department of Ag-

riculture (USDA) Farm Labor Survey. Now, the new final rule says DOL will use the Bureau of Labor Statistics' (BLS) Employment Cost Index to determine wages and salaries for the preceding 12-month period.

Proponents of the change say the way the AEWR was calculated could cause wild fluctuations in the minimum wage rate, making it difficult for farmers and ranchers to plan and budget for seasonal labor expenses. Others applauding the new final rule said it will help ensure H-2A wages keep pace with wage increases in the overall economy.

"Texas farmers and ranchers are dedicated to providing their employees a fair wage rate but continue to struggle under inadequate H-2A rules," Laramie Adams, TFB national legislative director, said. "The new rule is a step in the right direction. However, comprehensive and flexible agricultural guest worker reform is still critically needed to really solve the agricultural labor crisis. We will

continue to work with Congress and the administration to provide meaningful reform that will allow farmers more opportunities to hire the workers they need to continue operating."

Many in agriculture are encouraged by the announcement, including U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue.

"Over the past several years, farm wages have increased at a higher pace than other industries, which is why this DOL rule could not come at a better time," Perdue said.

New methodology

The new final rule keeps minimum H-2A wage rates for most field and livestock worker occupations at the 2020 level for the next two years. Figures from the USDA's November 2019 farm labor survey will be used to determine AEWRs through the end of 2022.

DOL estimates about 97 percent of all farmworkers will fall into one of the job categories affected by the temporary freeze on AEWRs.

Jobs in this category include produce graders and sorters, ag equipment operators, farmworkers and laborers at greenhouses and nurseries, farm and ranch hands and those who pack agricultural goods by hand.

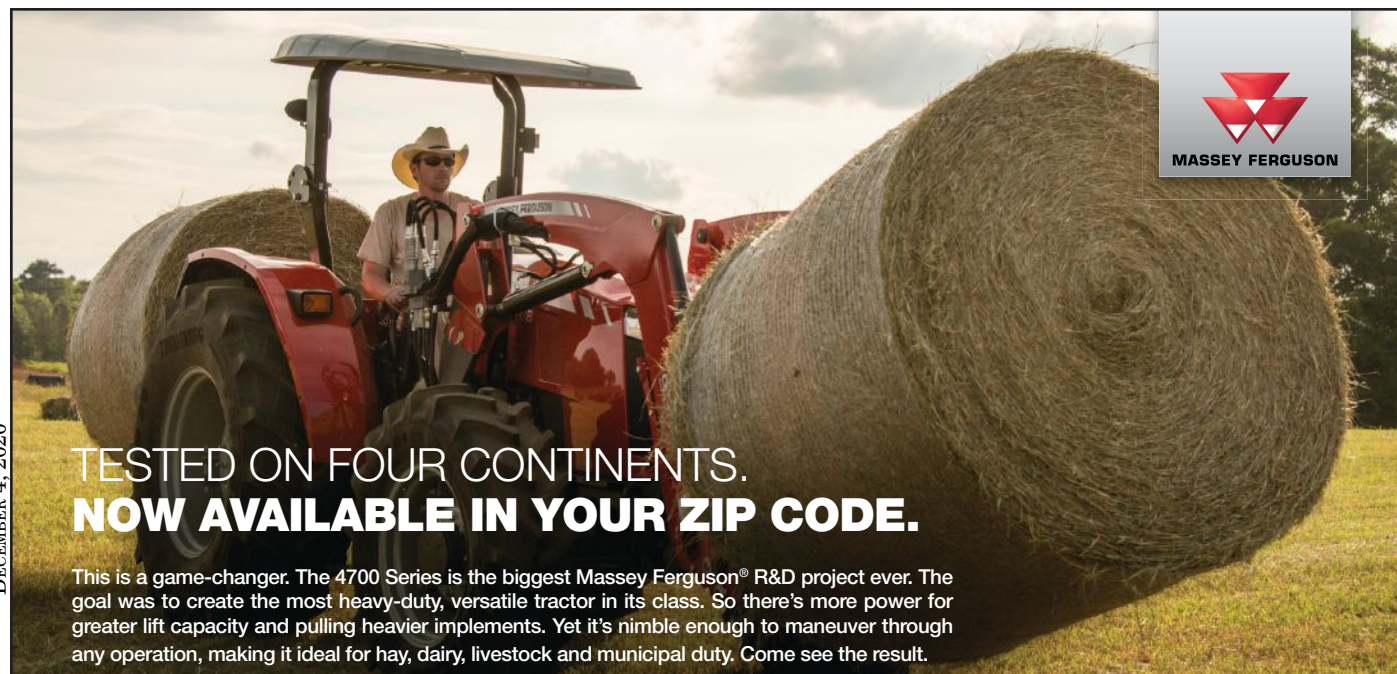
Beginning annually in 2023, DOL will adjust AEWRs for those job categories by the percentage change of the BLS employment cost index for the prior 12 months.

For all other agricultural jobs, DOL will set and annually adjust the AEWRs using average hourly wages for the occupational classification reported by the BLS Occupational Employment Statistics Survey program. These agricultural jobs are often supervisory or higher skilled and uniquely-skilled jobs.

DOL intends to issue a second final rule that will address other aspects of the certification of agricultural labor or services performed by H-2A workers, as well as enforcement of contractual obligations applicable to employers of those workers.

The new rule is a victory for farmers and ranchers who have long asked for regulatory reform in many areas of the H-2A program, according to American Farm Bureau Federation President Zippy Duvall.

"Farmers are committed to paying their employees a fair wage, but the existing system sets unpredictable rates that make it hard for farmers to remain competitive. DOL's decision to maintain current pay rates for the next two years for the majority of H-2A employers provides stability during the uncertainty created by the pandemic and trade imbalances," Duvall said. "While this decision does not solve all the wage issues, it is a step in the right direction."



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Texas Farm Bureau announces new 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.

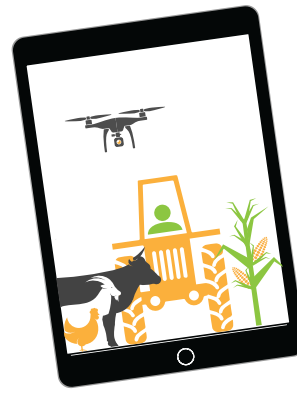
“The goal of the program is to really engage young students in the classroom by giving them unique opportunities to see how agriculture fits into things they’re learning and how it’s part of their daily lives,” Jordan Walker, TFB director of Educational Outreach, said. “Even when kids are engaging in 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. 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



FARM FROM SCHOOL

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.”

Additional details and the application are available at texasfarmbureau.org/aitc.

Contact Walker at jwalker1@txfb.org or call 254-751-2569 with questions.



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Cagan Baldree: From hay fields to the football field

By Jennifer Dorsett
Field Editor

On a gray morning in rural East Texas, the overcast sky promises rain. Cagan Baldree stands on the back porch, surveying the green, rolling pasture and pine trees beyond.

“The property we’re on is where I was raised. My family roots run very, very deep right here in this spot,” he said.

Cagan’s dad, Cody, was raised in the same house. Cagan’s grandmother still lives on the property a short half mile away.

Cody transitioned out of the dairy business into growing hay and raising beef cattle in the early ’90s. He married Shannon Pennington in 1996, and together they had Cagan, Callahan and Caroline.

Cagan has fond memories of helping his dad and playing with his siblings on the farm.

“We did everything together—just



Cagan Baldree’s family are Farm Bureau members. They raise cattle and grow hay in Panola County.

riding around with my dad, feeding the dogs, feeding the cattle, riding on the tractor with him while he cut hay,” he said. “We still had the dairy barn up here. It wasn’t in use, but me and my brother loved to go play in there, because there was so much to climb on and check out. We were always fishing and hunting on the back of the place.”

Although life as a farm kid was

busy, there was time for sports, too.

Cody coached Cagan’s and Callahan’s baseball teams throughout their childhood, and he taught his kids to approach sports the same way they approached tasks on the farm.

“He instilled in us what is most important—like why it’s important to take care of your own stuff and to take responsibility for what you’ve

been blessed with,” Cagan said.

In 2008, when Cagan was 10 years old, the family found out Cody had leukemia.

A two-year battle followed. Cagan’s dad would go into remission only to have the cancer come back in another area.

Still, in 2010, things seemed better. But then the Baldrees received another devastating blow.

Cody had a cancerous mass on the lining of his brain, a particularly difficult area to treat. As a result of an invasive chemotherapy treatment, he became paralyzed from the waist down and lost the use of his legs.

“Cody went from being my kids’ hero and just this larger-than-life personality to in a wheelchair almost overnight,” Shannon said. “But Cagan became his daddy’s legs. He did the things Cody couldn’t do, like hooking up the tractor, helping him get in and out of it. He took on so much responsi-



Cagan Baldree is Texas A&M University's fullback. Photo courtesy Texas A&M Athletics.

bility at such a young age.”

The situation weighed on Cagan sometimes, but he would gladly do whatever it took to help his dad.

Cody lost his fight with leukemia in 2014, but not before watching Cagan and the rest of the Carthage Bulldogs take home the Texas 3A Division 1 high school football championship in December 2013.

“It was definitely God’s timing that the last football game of mine he saw was that one,” Cagan said. “I remember it wasn’t something he necessarily liked or wanted, but because he was in his wheelchair at the time, he got really good seats because of where he was supposed to sit. I remember looking up to him in the crowd throughout the game and after the game. Being able to see him right there close was special.”

After Cody passed away, Cagan pitched in around the house, worked on the property and chauffeured his younger brother and sister to after-school activities, all while maintaining his own academic and athletic schedule.

“At that point, Cagan truly became the man of the house,” Shannon said. “He just stepped up, and he was really a godsend to me. I couldn’t have gotten through it without him.”

When Cagan graduated high school in 2016 as salutatorian of his class, he was at a crossroads.

He had always loved baseball,

but football seemed a better fit for the 6’4” athlete. There were football scholarship offers on the table from smaller schools, but Cagan’s dream was to attend Texas A&M University.

“I told my head coach ‘I’m just going to go to A&M. That’s where I’ve always wanted to go, and because the education part of it is a lot more important to me right now, that’s kind of the plan,’” Cagan said.

Cagan’s coach suggested he try to walk on to the football team.

So, he did. After receiving preferred walk-on status, Cagan played center and guard for three seasons. While he was happy to be at his favorite school and on the football roster, it just wasn’t enough.

“When I got in, I was already undersized to begin with, so I was always constantly trying to train, eat as much as I possibly could, gain as much weight as I possibly could. But I never really could get over that threshold,” Cagan said.

But that hard-earned farm kid grit and determination carried Cagan to a breakthrough.

Things began to fall into place when, in 2017, Texas A&M hired head coach Jimbo Fisher. During the 2018 season, Fisher reintroduced the position of fullback to the Aggie offensive line formation.

“A little over a year ago, I knew this was kind of the last shot of it happening,” Cagan said. “I really wanted to



Cagan with his dad, Cody, after one of his high school football games before his dad passed away. Photo courtesy of the Baldree family.

get on the field. I knew I had worked very hard and just wanted that one shot in a position that would fit my skill set a little more.”

He approached Fisher in January 2019 about playing fullback in the fall.

“The thing you don’t realize about him is he can catch the football,” Fisher told the *Houston Chronicle* in an interview last year. “He said, ‘I can catch, coach,’ and I said, ‘All linemen say they can catch, because they want the ball.’ Then we put him in there, and he can catch the ball very well.”

In true Baldree fashion, Cagan trained hard and earned the position, getting leaner, faster and stronger.

He played all 12 games last season. Now, in his final season playing for Texas A&M, Cagan is the starting fullback.

But due to the novel coronavirus pandemic, it wasn’t even certain there would be a football season this year.

“COVID-19 affected me just like everyone else. It added some stress for my wife and I when we were planning our wedding, which took place July 11, but it went off without a hitch, just with limited capacity,” he said. “Then, of course, our football season was delayed until Sept. 26, but we weren’t even sure it would happen at all at first.”

Cagan plans to keep training hard,

playing hard and studying hard to reach his goals. But without his agricultural background, Cagan said his success could have never happened.

“It goes back to the way my dad raised us, that there’s a blessing in work,” Cagan said. “Whatever the situation was, we’d take the same mentality, mindset, discipline, hard work and attention to detail in anything that we do—whether that be working here on the place or with sports. If you just let things go, it’s not going to look like something you want to take hold of, and that’s the same thing with a football career. I need to take care of my own body. I need to take care of training and making sure that I’m prepared to do what I need to do.”

No matter where football or life takes him in the future, Cagan’s roots are firmly planted. And they’ll always bring him home again.

“My brother and my sister and I were my dad’s pride and joy,” Cagan said. “But this land and where our roots are set is also so foundational to who we are as a family. We’ll always make sure that this place is cherished and taken care of and appreciated for what it is and what it’s meant to us. It’s just an amazing testament to how we’ve been blessed as a family to lean on each other when things are tough. God strengthened us through that. It’s not always a happy story, but there’s so much depth there.”

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USDA nationwide feedlot study scheduled to take place in 2021

By Jennifer Dorsett
Field Editor

A comprehensive nationwide feedlot study was originally slated for 2020 by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), but cattle market disruptions brought about by COVID-19 derailed those plans.

Now, the National Animal Health Monitoring System (NAHMS) feedlot study is set to take place from March through August 2021.

In collaboration with the USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), APHIS will conduct a national study focusing on cattle health and management of U.S. feedlots with at least 50 head of cattle, according to Dr. Chelsey Shivley, USDA APHIS veterinary medical officer-epidemiologist from Fort Collins, Colo.

"The study is designed to provide a snapshot of current feedlot cattle health management practices," Shivley said in an interview with *Drovers*. "The information we collect will allow for the analysis of trends in specific topics related to cattle health. We want to better understand what diseases and issues are providing the greatest challenges to producers."

The 2021 study aims to provide an overview of current feedlot cattle health management practices, identify trends in feedlot cattle health management and antibiotic use and estimate the prevalence of feedlot cattle diseases.

Data collected will be used to help policymakers and stakeholders assess overall feedlot disease preparedness and make informed decisions when it comes to feedlot cattle health and management practices. Research and development needs across the industry will be also be more easily identifiable through this study.

Other information gathered by Shivley and her team will be used for economic analyses of the U.S. feedlot industry, to help identify educational needs related to feedlot cattle health and will provide credible, independent documentation of U.S. feedlot industry practices not collected by the industry itself.

Benchmark data on feedlot cattle health management practices also will be gathered to inform quality assurance programs.

Invitations to participate in the study will be mailed in February to randomly selected feedlots across the nation. All information gathered is confidential, and study participation is voluntary.

Participation in the study creates positive results for ranchers and feedlots, said Dr. Dee Griffin, director of the Texas A&M University College of Veterinary Medicine Veterinary Education, Research & Outreach (VERO) Program.

"The NAHMS reports for cow-calf [operations] and feedlots have, for decades, provided solid, non-biased information to rancher and feedlot managers to help them understand how their colleagues in the beef in-



dustry manage cattle," Griffin said in a statement published on behalf of APHIS. "From my long history as a veterinarian serving beef producers, I ask you to sincerely consider supporting the NAHMS survey efforts."

Representatives from NASS will visit participating operations next March through April to complete a questionnaire. If participants choose

to continue in the study, USDA or state veterinary health professionals will visit feedlots from June through August to complete a second questionnaire.

More information on NAHMS feedlot studies, including an information sheet on the upcoming 2021 project and summaries from the two latest studies, are available at aphis.usda.gov.

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TFB Resolutions Committee discusses agricultural issues

Performance bonds on land remediation for eminent domain projects, perimeter fencing for feral hog control and legislation and regulations to incentivize meat processing facilities topped the list of concerns as the Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) Resolutions Committee discussed proposed policy resolutions to the state's largest farm organization Nov. 2-3.

The committee, comprised of 41 TFB members representing Texas agriculture, spent two days reviewing, deliberating and consolidating more than 140 resolutions to both state and national policies proposed by county Farm Bureaus across the state.

The committee supported a resolution requiring performance bonds to ensure surface remediation.

Landowners who have had property seized by entities with the power of eminent domain frequently report surface damage issues following installation or maintenance of a project.

Often the entity fails to restore the easement area, and/or the property surrounding the easement area, to its original condition (or as close as reasonably possible).

Landowners can negotiate language into their easement contracts requiring payment for damages not

restored, but the current path to receive remediation for inadequate repair or cleanup is litigation. Requiring a performance bond would remedy this issue.

The committee approved a resolution supporting U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) amending its policy and including boundary fencing, as it refers to feral hog control, as an eligible conservation practice and activity. NRCS currently does not provide funding for perimeter fencing through its programs.

If the policy was amended by NRCS, farmers and ranchers could use cost-share programs to keep feral hogs out of their fields.

The committee approved a resolution supporting legislation that incentivizes the development of livestock and poultry processing facilities.

The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent shutdowns had an adverse effect on the supply chain and markets. Any solutions that can help remedy this, such as having more processing facilities, would be welcomed by farmers and ranchers.

A policy resolution that outlined items to be included in appraisals to property owners from appraisal districts was approved by the committee. It supported disclosure of

property deed and ownership of land from high speed rail entities.

The committee also approved a resolution supporting programs that provide funding for the processing of wildlife to be donated to food banks and others.

It issued support for a solution for robust price discovery in the cattle market, and it approved a resolution supporting the continuation of USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service import labeling requirements staying with all products to the end consumer.

"We had lots of resolutions sent in on tax entities, whether it's the appraisal district or local taxes or tax abatements. That was a big issue," Val Stephens, TFB secretary/treasurer and Resolutions Committee chair, said. "I think one resolution that stood

out is wind and solar companies asking for tax abatements and how it affects the local entities, whether it's school, city and county taxes."

The policy recommendations will be considered during the business session of the organization's 87th annual meeting Dec. 5 in Waco.

State resolutions adopted at the TFB annual meeting become policies that guide the organization.

National resolutions, if adopted by voting delegates at the TFB annual meeting, are sent to the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) annual convention for consideration.

Resolutions approved by AFBF delegates in January provide a roadmap for the national organization.

Coverage of the annual meeting's business session will be included in the January issue of Texas Agriculture.

Texas Farm Bureau AGFUND successful on election night

By Julie Tomascik
Editor

Candidates endorsed by Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) AGFUND fared well in the general election.

"We are pleased most of the candidates endorsed by Texas Farm Bureau AGFUND had a positive outcome in the 2020 election," Russell Boening, president of TFB AGFUND, said. "In fact, we had an overwhelming 97 percent success rate overall when you look at all the races where AGFUND was involved."

AGFUND-endorsed candidates finished election night with 146 wins and five losses.

In statewide races, AGFUND-backed candidates—including U.S. Sen. John Cornyn, Railroad Commissioner Jim Wright and Supreme Court of Texas Chief Justice Nathan Hecht—won their races.

All 31 candidates endorsed by AGFUND in Congressional races

were successful.

In the Texas Senate races, AGFUND-supported candidates won 14 and lost one. In the Texas House races, AGFUND-supported candidates won 95 and lost two.

Boening noted it's important to have elected officials who understand the needs and issues facing rural Texas.

"The rural vote is critically important for candidates to be successful, especially as urban areas in Texas continue to grow. We are encouraged to see leaders on both sides of the aisle who support agriculture win," Boening said. "We look forward to our continued work with these elected officials in helping farm and ranch families and landowners thrive."

Texas Farm Bureau is the state's largest general farm and ranch organization. AGFUND is its political action arm funded by voluntary donations from members.



The 41 members of the TFB Resolutions Committee discussed policy resolutions from county Farm Bureaus while fully observing COVID-19 protocols and safety measures at the TFB Conference and Training Center.

Hays County young farmer grows his first hemp crop

By Jennifer Dorsett
Field Editor

Since 2015, the owner of Tejas Hemp, Aaron Owens, has successfully marketed a line of cannabidiol (CBD) products in Texas. After growing hemp in the Lone Star State became legal in 2019, the Hays County Farm Bureau member was ready to give it a try.

Owens, a West Texas native and longtime goat and cattle rancher, has been working with a Colorado-based partner on an exclusive CBD extraction process for several years.

“I’ve been ranching full time in Ozona for about 15 years, and I’ve been building my brand, Tejas Hemp, for the last four or five years retailing products,” he said. “It’s our first shot at production, so I just decided to plant a couple of acres and try my hand at it.”

There were some challenges along the way, including sourcing enough water for the crop. When the plants first started growing, Owens was watering at a rate of 2,000 gallons per acre per day. But during the plants’ bloom period, he was sending anywhere from 5,000-6,000 gallons of water per acre into his fields, necessitating a new water well.

“If you’re trying to maximize the oil properties and maximize the flower yields, which is what we were trying to do, you’re looking at about 5,000 gallons per acre per day,” he said. “But hemp can be a drought-resistant crop. If you had a bunch of hemp plants on the open range and it didn’t rain, they’d live. They just wouldn’t get very big. It just depends on what you’re trying to do with the plants, and we’re looking at flower production. So, we needed lots of water.”

Armyworms and fire ants caused some issues, and the ongoing coronavirus pandemic presented challenges, too.

“The biggest challenge with COVID was just sourcing supplies and equipment. Usually, we’d go down to the store and buy a piece of



Hays County Farm Bureau member Aaron Owens, who has been marketing and retailing cannabidiol (CBD) products for several years, grew his first hemp crop in 2020. Courtesy photo.



The irrigated hemp plants grew six feet tall in about four months. Transplants were set in July and harvested in October. Photo courtesy Aaron Owens.

equipment, but the pandemic really set suppliers back in terms of logistics,” he said. “We needed a sprayer to spray for caterpillars. I tried to buy one, and they were six weeks out. That wouldn’t work because I had to have it the next day, so I drove to San Angelo and bought a

firefighting rig and made that work for spraying.”

But overall, Owens feels like he had a good first year with the fast-growing crop.

“It was a bumper crop. We were just hoping for knee-high or thigh-high plants, and we got up to five

and six feet tall. I germinated 5,000 seeds in early June and planted them in the ground on July 17,” he said. “Then on Oct. 17, we harvested our first acre. On Halloween weekend, we harvested our second acre for about 4,000 plants total.”

Instead of trying to grow a big crop on lots of land, he focused on growing just two acres of hemp, what he calls “boutique farming.”

That’s because current market prices don’t support industrial-scale costs.

“We’re in the mom-and-pop scale. We’re not out there on tractors. This is all by hand, boutique stuff,” Owens said. “When you’re farming hemp biomass for extraction of CBD oil at scale, the cost of production on biomass with tractors, or mechanized industrial production, is \$2 per pound. But the current market value of commodity-traded CBD biomass is about 50 cents. In 2020, the last thing you wanted to be was a large-scale CBD biomass farmer, because the market was disappearing. I knew I didn’t want to do that. I focused on finding genetics for a plant variety that no one else on the market had, and it paid off.”

When it came to plant genetics, though, Owens still had trouble finding what he was looking for, even with his industry contacts and connections he’s made through his partnership in Colorado.

“I have that little bit of an advantage because of my networks and industry experience, but even I had my challenges and my struggles,” he said. “The biggest battle is finding genetics that you can trust and finding a source that will be accountable. Because when these guys come in from Oregon and sell \$250,000 worth of seed to a co-op in Texas and drive off, and then those seeds don’t act like they were supposed to, there’s no real insurance or anything yet where you can hold those people accountable. That leaves us, the farmer, in a huge pickle.”

It’s a difficult issue with no easy

answer besides more time and research. According to Owens, hybridized hemp plant genetics are generally not stable until the breeder has reached F10, or the tenth generation after the initial hybridization.

“If you’re trying to take a boutique strain, something no one else has that’s not stable, and merge it with something stable, you need to get to an F10 before you’ve ironed out all the phenotypes to really have something that will perform consistently,” he said. “If you don’t have

stable genetics, you can suffer from things like hermaphroditism, or self-pollinating females that will seed your crop when you’re not trying to seed your crop.”

For the industry to really grow, Owens believes more emphasis needs to be placed on reliable seed genetics.

“One of the most important things we can do, and something I’m going to be focused on as we move forward, is securing and proliferating appropriate genetics, not only for this climate and geography but for

the political climate,” Owens said. “We need dependable genetics that fit Texas and that fit the political climate, so people can have success with what they farm.”

But despite the struggles and challenges, Owens thinks there is a secure future for hemp production in Texas.

“The future of all of this for the Texas farmer, in my opinion, is going to be something called the tri-crop, where we can commercially produce hemp at scale with tractors

and equipment, and we’ll be able to monetize the fiber, the grain and the biomass, all three. That’s when the Texas farmer will be able to make money in production,” he said. “In order to have that, we must have processing facilities set up to be able to take that material, when we harvest it and dry it and secure it through a mechanized system. Basically, the future is bright, and the direction is tri-crop. We just need the support infrastructure, so our farmers can get to work.”



Growing hemp for flower and biomass production is labor-intensive. Seedlings were transplanted on July 17 and required heavy irrigation to maximize flower and oil development. The plants are harvested by hand and hung to dry in a drying barn, similar to tobacco drying. Owens harvested around 4,000 plants from two irrigated acres. Photos courtesy Aaron Owens.

Texas dairy production overflowing with growth

By Jennifer Dorsett
Field Editor

Continued rapid growth in the Texas dairy industry is both a good and bad thing, according to Texas Association of Dairymen Executive Director Darren Turley.

“We’re at an interesting intersection right now where we’re producing so much milk that we’ve outpaced processing capacity,” Turley said. “We’ve had several relatively mild weather years in a row here, so we’ve been able to keep growing our production without any major hits. Now, we’re at the point to where we don’t have any new plant growth for the foreseeable future, and we’re pretty much where we’re going to be in terms of capacity for the next few years. We’re proud of the growth in our industry, but we have to manage it carefully, so our members stay profitable.”

Texas dairy farmers produced 1.2 billion pounds of milk in August, which is nearly 8 percent more milk than what was produced in August 2019.

In February 2020, production was up 11 percent year-over-year.

The latest U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) quarterly milk production report shows milk production is not only up in Texas, but across much of the country, as well.

Turley noted Texas will need additional processing plants, which take at least a couple of years to build, to deal with such a large increase.

“Everybody understands the situation we’re in here in Texas—having additional milk and not really having an outlet for additional sales,” he said. “Moving milk across the country is very detrimental to each producer’s milk check.”

To help manage production, the Greater Southwest Agency, which includes milk cooperatives Dairy Farmers of America and Select Milk Producers, adopted a tiered-pricing plan when processing capacity is unavailable for the group to sell all its members’ milk.

“Now, when we start having milk



produced in excess of our sales, there’s a program in place to pay producers a much lower rate for everything over 90 percent of the milk produced,” Turley said. “It’s not too bad up to 92 percent, but at 93 percent and above, the price is a very big detriment to overproduction.”

The pricing policy has been adopted for three years, with an option to extend the program at the end of that term if market conditions haven’t improved.

The program only goes into effect when the cooperatives cannot sell all the milk, according to Turley.

“It’s kind of an unusual program. California ran a similar program but with a production allotment year-round, and a lot of producers are not fans of that,” Turley said. “Hopefully, in three years, we can see new plant growth and things change in the market where we can go back to a normal way of doing business.”

Every farm is different, and it’s an unfortunate time for families trying to expand farms to support a new generation of dairy farmers.

“We were in a situation where we knew there was continually going to be more milk if something wasn’t done, unfortunately,” he said. “This tiered-pricing plan will affect each farm differently, but it’s better than the losses incurred when dumping milk, which is still very expensive under current Texas Commission of Environmental Quality rules.”

Most of the nation is facing a similar situation, he said.

“In Texas, we’ve had several bad years of drought followed by low

prices, and our guys were really just getting back to healthy this year. A lot of the country is in the same shape,” Turley said. “A lot of the improvements we’ve made on dairy farms put more milk in the market that has to be dealt with, and that’s the biggest concern for our cooperatives: How to best serve our produc-

ers. One of the hardest things to do is decide what to do with excess milk.”

In addition to managing milk production, Turley urged dairy farmers to sign up for risk management tools to help navigate challenges currently faced by those in the industry.

“We encourage any form of risk management—USDA program, insurance, forward marketing, hedging. Producers should take part in any and all programs that can help make them more secure and more stable in these unprecedented times,” Turley said. “We’re stable and very strong in Texas, and our farmers really have just continued to grow and survived the pandemic really well overall. Texas dairy has grown for a long time and will continue to grow, just at a slower rate. But we know things can happen, so it’s best to be prepared as well as we can through these types of programs.”

Don’t get burned! Handle firewood safely

By Jennifer Dorsett
Field Editor

It’s important to handle firewood properly to prevent the spread of diseases and pests, which are easily transmitted by moving fallen trees and cut firewood.

Remember: burn it where you buy it. The best option is to select firewood that comes from within a 50-mile radius of where it’s going to be burned. Don’t transport wood from the hunting camp to the house, or vice versa. Harvest the wood nearby or buy firewood from a reputable source.

Firewood from other areas—including other counties in Texas—can spread oak wilt disease, a devastating fungal infection that is fatal to oak trees.

Oak wilt is prevalent in Central Texas, according to the Texas Forest Service. There are now 76 counties across the state with confirmed cases of oak wilt, mostly along the I-35 corridor.

The *Bretziella fagacearum* fungus inhibits the tree’s ability to

conduct water through its vascular system, causing the tree to die. All oaks are susceptible, but red oak species are affected more dramatically, often completely succumbing to the disease in as little as three months. People often unknowingly transmit oak wilt to new areas when cutting up fallen trees and taking the wood home for firewood.

And there are other pests, too.

The red imported fire ant and emerald ash borer are invasive species with established quarantine zones in Texas. The Texas Department of Agriculture prohibits moving plant materials, such as firewood, from inside quarantined areas to prevent the spread of these pests.

For more information on storing and handling firewood, visit <https://www.dontmovefirewood.org/>.

If oak wilt is suspected on area trees, Texans can contact a local Texas A&M Forest Service Oak Wilt forester. Contact information is available at <https://texasoakwilt.org/find-my-forester/>.

New staff join Texas Farm Bureau

Two new staff joined Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) this year.

Joy Davis joined the Government Affairs division as an associate legislative director in March 2020.

Davis works in the legislative office in Austin where she monitors issues and legislation pertaining to criminal justice, energy, labor, taxes, transportation, utility regulation, tort reform and related agency appropriations.

Davis most recently worked for her family's business. They grow corn, wheat, oats, hay and raise cattle. They also have a custom fertilizer application, custom harvesting and commodity trucking business.

Prior to that, she was the campaign manager and chief of staff for State Rep. DeWayne Burns during two legislative sessions.

In college, she interned for U.S. Congressman Pete Geren in Fort Worth, former President George H. W. Bush in Houston and Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison in Washington, D.C.

Davis has been heavily involved with TFB. She competed in TFB's Young Farmer & Rancher (YF&R) Discussion Meet, served as the chair

of the YF&R Advisory Committee and participated in the organization's AgLead program. She also served on the Johnson County Farm Bureau board of directors and was a member of the American Farm Bureau Federation's Partners in Ag Leadership Program.

Davis was raised on her family's farm in Grandview. She earned a bachelor's degree in agribusiness from Texas A&M University and a master's in business administration from Texas Christian University.

Davis now resides in Austin.

Whitney Richter joined the organization in October as the marketing coordinator for TFB's member benefits program.

In this role, she is responsible for administering the organization's member benefits program and implementing marketing strategies to enhance and promote the current benefits.

She will also evaluate, monitor and recommend changes to current programs, as well as research and recommend new potential programs. In addition, Richter will manage relationships with benefit partners, planning their presence at meetings,



Joy Davis



Whitney Richter

conferences and events.

Prior to her position at Farm Bureau, Richter was the director of Marketing and Communications for the Office of the Vice Provost for Research at Baylor University. She also held positions at the Greater Waco Chamber of Commerce, Center for Learning & Development and the Stockyards Station, among others.

The Waco native earned a bachelor's degree in agricultural services

and development, with an emphasis in agricultural communications, from Tarleton State University.

She is a Leadership Waco graduate of Class XXXI. The program is designed to get local individuals and leaders involved in the Waco community.

Richter lives in China Spring and continues to help her family with their seedstock Angus operation, which is based outside of Waco.



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Texas youth organizations win big in national denim recycling contest

By Jennifer Dorsett
Field Editor

Two West Texas FFA chapters and one 4-H club are taking home the green for recycling some blue—blue jeans, that is.

Meadow FFA, Olton FFA and Hutchinson County 4-H kept more than 2,500 denim clothing articles from area landfills through the Blue Jeans Go Green denim drive, sponsored by PhytoGen, the U.S. cottonseed brand of Corteva Agriscience.

In first place, Meadow FFA collected 1,563 pairs of jeans for the top prize of \$2,000. Olton FFA, who won the contest last year, came in second this time and received \$1,000 for their efforts. Hutchinson County 4-H received \$500 for third place.

While the COVID-19 pandemic put an initial halt to the contest, the shutdown helped them collect more denim, according to Meadow FFA Booster Club member and Denim Drive Coordinator Monica Caswell.

“The cut-off date was initially in

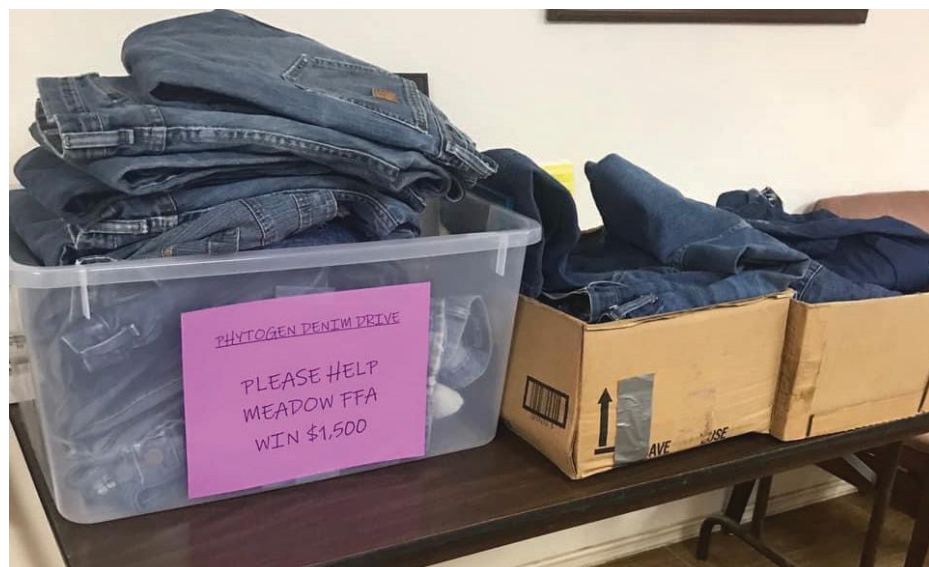
April, and we were going to take all the donations to Lubbock and drop them off at the Texas Cotton Ginners Association meeting and trade show. Then, the world shut down. Since that was canceled, we had a couple of more months to collect the denim,” Caswell said. “People were at home and cleaning out their closets, and we actually collected quite a bit more over that time. We ended up having to box it up and get shipping labels and set up a time with UPS to ship them to Arizona, but it was worth the effort.”

Caswell, whose family grows cotton in Terry County, learned about the contest on social media. She asked the agricultural science teacher if he would encourage students to participate if she coordinated the project.

Then, it was just a matter of community involvement, and Terry County residents rose to the occasion.

“Our community really helped.

We put up collection boxes at the



Meadow FFA was one of the three youth organizations from West Texas collecting denim as part of PhytoGen's Blue Jeans Go Green event. Photo courtesy Monica Caswell.

Meadow Co-op Gin, Needmore Gin, Terry County Veterinary Hospital and First Baptist Church of Meadow,” she said. “Farmers and customers at the vet saw the boxes and cleaned out their closets. No one really knows what to do with old denim that’s ripped or just too worn out to be reused. They don’t want to throw them away, but there didn’t used to be anything else to do with them. This program keeps them out of the landfill and turns old jeans into a useful product.”

Caswell also reached out to a program in Lubbock called Caleb’s Closet. The non-profit organization collects donations of gently-used clothing and household items to help families of foster children, who often are placed into foster care with little or no personal belongings.

“It was more than just our little town of Meadow that sent denim. It was people in Lubbock and Brownfield and other areas that contributed. I contacted Caleb’s Closet in Lubbock to see if they ever got any ripped denim or jeans that they couldn’t use. So, as they got donations they couldn’t use, they passed them our way,” Caswell said. “They helped a lot. I think they donated something like 300 pairs of jeans that were too worn out or ripped. We plan to give back to that organiza-

tion with some of the winnings from the PhytoGen contest.”

In 2019, PhytoGen became the first cottonseed company to collaborate with the Blue Jeans Go Green program, a Cotton, Inc. initiative that upcycles denim garments into premium housing insulation and keeps denim out of landfills, by hosting the first nationwide denim collection drive program.

The first Blue Jeans Go Green denim drive was a success, with more than 7,412 items collected last year through drives at cotton industry events and company locations across the U.S. Local FFA and 4-H chapters participated by collecting denim in their communities.

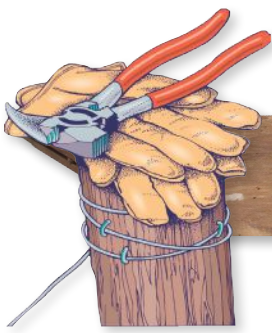
The collaboration between PhytoGen and the Blue Jeans Go Green initiative, combined with local FFA and 4-H chapter involvement is a recipe for success, according to PhytoGen Brand Manager Derek Racca.

“Thanks to the participation of local FFA and 4-H chapters, old denim will be recycled and put to good use as home insulation, with a portion being distributed to charitable organizations,” Racca said. “It’s rewarding for PhytoGen cottonseed to be involved with an initiative that supports cotton-growing communities and promotes cotton’s sustainability.”



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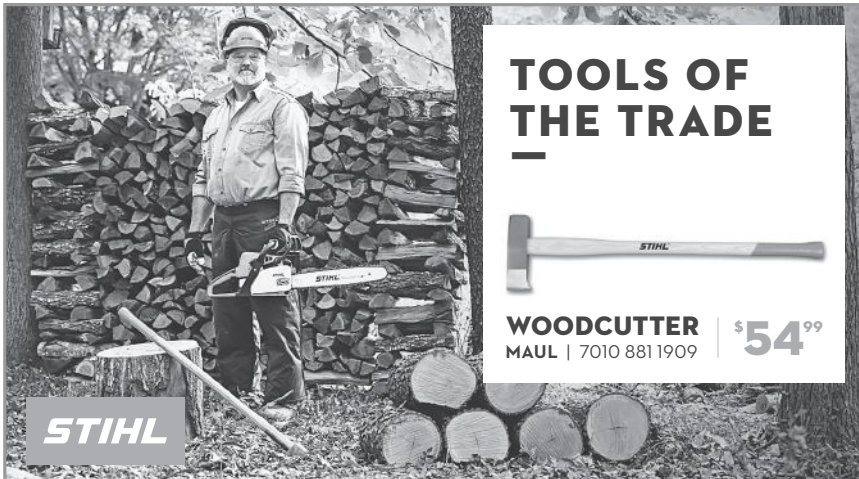
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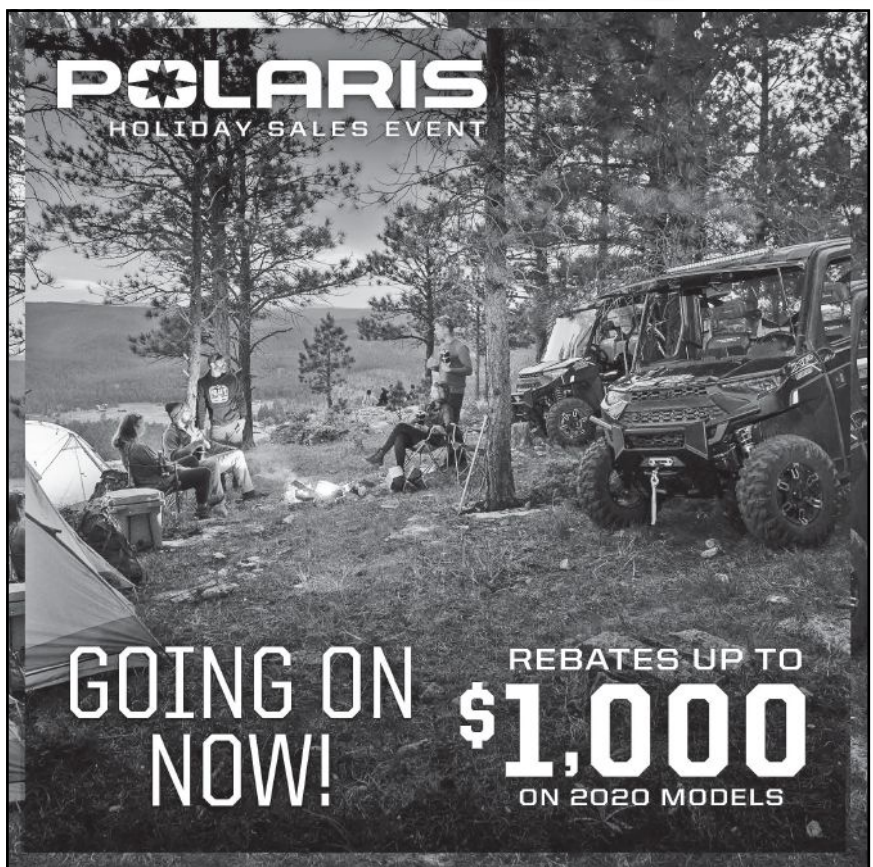
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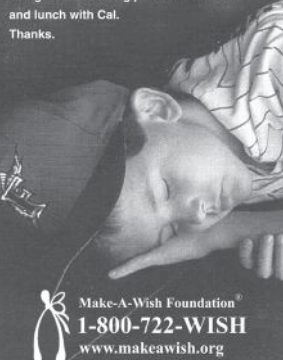
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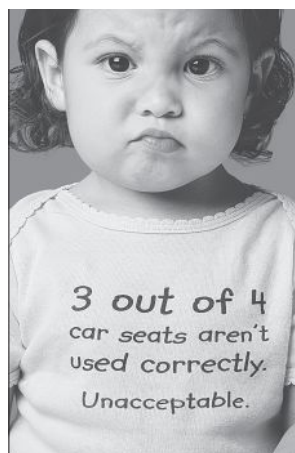
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Published by the Texas Farm Bureau for commercial farmers and ranchers

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