

# TEXAS A&M AGRI LIFE

## Walker County Agriculture News Update

**April 2016**

Greetings from the Walker  
County, Texas A&M AgriLife  
Extension office!

**“The discovery of agriculture was the first big step toward a civilized life.” - Arthur Keith**

### **This quote was the tag line for National 4-H’s meme on National Agriculture Day.**

Supporting the quote was a photo of two 4-H Members from Montgomery County with their livestock projects. I found the message applicable and compelling. Bringing young people into agriculture is an important endeavor. As Extension Agents, we work with youth and adult audiences with mutual priority. Why? Today’s societal organization includes many without direct contact to the land and production of its bounty. The important item which I want to pass along here is how imperative it is that we each share our positive message of agriculture with all. Our end-use consumers must know of the environmental care and production effort involved with agriculture to then appreciate quality food and fiber products which are provided for them. We need their support and appreciation of our effort. Losing our agricultural production capabilities will predispose society to the loss of our civilized life. Unfortunately, there are many among us without this knowledge of connection. I am all about making connections where possible, as you will see in my article contained in this newsletter.

- ***When you have the opportunity, let others hear your message.***

### **Upcoming Events:**

#### **It is time for the Walker County Fair!**

**April 1-9, 2016**

**Walker County Fair Grounds  
(Hwy 30 West)**

Come out to the 2016 Walker County Fair for a great family fun time. 4-H & FFA youth have been preparing for all the events and are ready for you to see their projects. A detailed schedule of county fair events, activities and attractions can be found online at: <http://www.walkercountyfair.com/>

You are invited to attend the Fair and cheer the youth of Walker County on as they exhibit their wide variety of projects. Don’t miss any of the excitement over the two Fair weeks (April 1-9, 2016). There is a great variety of fun activities and events scheduled during the 2016 County Fair. Join us April 7<sup>th</sup> for the 7 PM Premium Livestock Sale (Buyer’s Pre-Sale Party begins at 5:30 PM), and April 9<sup>th</sup> for the 12 Noon, Non-Livestock (Supervised Projects, Art, Horticulture, Baked & Canned Goods) & Livestock Freezer Sale.

**Come out and support these youth – they are truly our future!**

## **2016 Walker County Farmers Market: Organizational Meeting**

**March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2016 @ 5:30 PM**

**Walker County Extension Office (102 Tam Road, Huntsville)**

If you are interested in selling in the 2016 Market, you are invited to come out to this meeting and help set the dates and procedures for the year. This Market has been in existence since the mid-1960s and is still going strong with participation from local producers.

## **Sustainable Control of Small Ruminant Parasites**

**Saturday, April 2nd @ 9:00 AM-1:00 PM**

**G.Rollie White Visitor Center in the O.D. Butler Animal Science Complex  
7707 Raymond Stotzer Parkway (Hwy 60)**

**College Station, TX 77845**

**\$25.00 / Lunch provided**

Lecture discussing worm biology, diagnosis, treatment and management of parasites. Practical session covering FAMACHA scoring and body condition scoring. FAMACHA cards can be ordered at event for additional \$13.00 each. Please, participants under 18 years old. RSVP to the Brazos Co Extension Office at (979) 823-0129 or [ejbesser@ag.tamu.edu](mailto:ejbesser@ag.tamu.edu) by Tuesday, March 29<sup>th</sup>.



## **Texas Beef Quality Producer Program**

**April 19<sup>th</sup>, 2016 @ 6:30 PM**

**Montgomery Co Extension Office**

**9020 Airport Road, Conroe, TX 77303**

**Preregistration before 4/15 to (936) 539-7822 or [m-heimer@tamu.edu](mailto:m-heimer@tamu.edu)**

The mission of the Texas Beef Quality Producer Program is to promote good management practices for cattle producers in an effort to strengthen consumer confidence in beef as wholesome food product. Proven beef quality practices are just better methods of doing the same jobs you're already doing. The main focus of the program is food safety. Eliminating residues, blemishes and foreign objects is critical to maintaining consumer confidence and acceptance of beef as a protein of choice in their diet.

To become a TBQP certified producer, you must attend a training program. There is no cost for the certification process and the certification helps strengthen your marketing potential. A steak meal will be provided by the Texas Beef Council!

## **Forests In Flux: Educational Series**

**TAMU: Horticulture/Forest Science Building**

**4:00 – 5:00 PM**

The Ecosystem Science & Management department at TAMU will be holding a 2016 Spring Seminar Series on the Texas A&M campus at the HFSB building; room 104 (unless otherwise specified). Remaining presentations in this series are as follows:

### **Apr. 5 Dr. Harold Burkhart – Forest biometry**

Department of Forest Resources and Environmental Conservation, Virginia Tech

### **Apr. 12 Dr. Jianbang Gan – PINEMAP project**

Ecosystem Science and Management, TAMU

## Agricultural Resources for You

### New Walker Co Ag Video(s):

**Evergreen Series: Yaupon** ([Link](#))

**Evergreen Series: Yucca** ([Link](#))

**Evergreen Series: Spanish Moss** ([Link](#))

In an effort to support our environmental education here in Walker County, I have continued to develop a posting of informational videos with Dr. Barron Rector, TX AgriLife Extension Range Specialist. We have a good set of videos produced (& more to come) which should provide you with some useful information relating to the environment we live in. The Evergreen Series looks at plants in our area which if you look carefully, you will see remain green year-round.

### Aquatic / Pond Weeds

Hey, it is that time of year and it has warmed up just a bit early – your aquatic weeds are already growing! The highly important message regarding aquatic weed control is that most control options are specific in effectiveness. To control an unwanted aquatic weed, you have to properly identify it. We can help you determine the answer to your situation; just bring a representative sample (*look closely-there may be more than one plant there*) in to the office (*in water*) for us to look at. Control options always work best before the plant spreads throughout the lake or pond creating additional issues, so don't wait too long. Some aquatic herbicides are really expensive and proper identification will help you evaluate your options and may just save you some money.

**There is an App for that:** [Aquaplant](#) by Texas AgriLife Extension Service (iTunes/\$5.99)

**There is also a great web site (FREE) for that:** [Aquaplant](#) A Pond Manager Diagnostics Tool Plant Id/Management Options (with links to recommended product labels)



### Seven Things Every Producer Should Know

By Joe Paschal, Extension Beef Specialist

The other day I was reading a paper written by my colleague Dr. Rick Machen titled "Seven Things Every Small Producer Should Know" and I thought it was worth covering the points he made here.

Size is relative in Texas. According to the 2012 USDA Census of Agriculture almost half of the state's cowherd is in herds of 100 head or more but they represent less than ten percent of farms and ranches. Ninety percent of us own the other half of the cows.

There are some important things all of us need to remember in this business and the first is to be good stewards of our land and its resources, namely soil, grass, water and wildlife. They are the basis for our livelihood. Ranchers probably don't get enough credit for what they have done to improve wildlife habitat in Texas, especially improved access to water and the eradication of the screwworm. The second important thing is to have a herd health program designed with your veterinarian. They know the disease and parasite issues in your area and what works and what doesn't.

Third is to make sure your cows get enough to eat. Body condition score, forage cover, plant selection and grazing behavior are good indicators of that. Fat cows are productive happy cows and don't forget the water! Fourth, reproductive performance is the single most important factor in profitability. Number of calves calved and weaned is more important than weaning weight in affecting profitability. Fifth, although winter is nearly over, always get the most out of your supplements including hay. It is expensive and we feed a lot of it. Cut it right, store it right and have it tested. Buy it by the ton, not the bale. Feed it to minimize waste.

Next, economy of scale works against smaller producers. Purchase products in larger quantities whenever you can if you are going to use them eventually. Consider leasing or renting equipment, bulls or labor rather than purchasing it. Finally, remember, you never know enough. Producing beef for the world is ever changing. Changes in public policy, property rights, weather, markets, costs, regulations, urban sprawl and land fragmentation all have an effect on the cattle business. Spend some time learning more about the business, support those organizations that look out for your interests, and learn to be a good neighbor. For more information on this contact your local County Extension Agent.

For additional reading: Machen, Rick. "Seven Things Every Small Producer Should Know". 2015 TSCRA Ranching 101. [http://animalscience.tamu.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2016/01/Seven-Things-Every-Small-Producer-Should-Know\\_2015.pdf](http://animalscience.tamu.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2016/01/Seven-Things-Every-Small-Producer-Should-Know_2015.pdf)

**Texas Horse Owners Needed for Survey**  
**Survey will remain open through May 1, 2016**  
**Participants must be at least 18 years of age**

Texas horse owners are invited to participate in a study of the Texas equine industry. The study, which is sponsored by the Texas Department of Agriculture, asks about horse ownership, participation in Equine Image horse-related activities, boarding facilities, and horse-related expenditures. Owners of businesses that serve the equine industry, such as feed stores, training facilities, farriers, and veterinarians, are also invited to participate in the survey. Access the Texas Horse Owners Survey [here](#).

## ***In This Issue:***

### **THE STORY OF THE BRANDING IRONS.**

**They will speak to you if you listen..**

We had a fairly recent discussion after placing brands on the wall during the dedication of a good friend's new camp house. Somewhere in the mix, my daughter commented about somebody needing to make her a brand. It got me to thinking.

I wanted Shelby to be the one to set Dad's (*her Grandfather*), and my Grandfather's brand on the wall with all the others. I think it is important to have tangible connections in life so that at some point you can look back and say they were here before me and I can relate to their existence.

You never know what the future will bring. Maybe someday years from now, a Lepley descendant will meet a Henry or a Newton descendant, and as things happen, a conversation develops where the family connections are realized. The story of the brands on the wall at the then old deer camp may come up and if they are lucky an opportunity to visit and take a look will occur. Hopefully, those yet unknown family members will still have the old original irons passed down through the generations to hold and feel.

The family stories will come to life for them if they are paying careful attention.



Back when the kid was little, I started drawing a \$ sign L brand for her. My thinking was that the kid was expensive. This past week at the Houston Livestock Show, I ran across this very brand on a horse which was being shown. They probably also have an expensive operation.



Here is my opinion on hot iron brands: If she wants one of her own, the kid needs to build her branding iron. That's part of what makes each one special. Looking at the craftsmanship; the way they are built or put together, and the materials of which they are made tells a story individually specific to the person to whom they belonged and the time they lived in. I do truly believe that.

## **The Story of the Branding Irons.**

**By Reggie Lepley, CEA-Ag/NR**

Handmade branding irons are all individuals just like the people that owned them.

Dad used a propane heater with his iron in the working pens from the 60's up until the time he sold out during the mid-80s. His is a short, one-handed thing so it didn't stick too far out of the heater and get in the way while you were working the chute area. It has a homemade wooden handle held on by a piece of heavy wire probably picked out of a scrap bucket. The rocker part of the brand itself is supported by an old bolt welded to the main stem, probably from the same scrap bucket as the handle wire. To my thinking, the mark that Rocking E makes is a true work of art. Dad could weld but never did too much that I know of, so I suspect that the actual builder of the iron was Pop Foster. Pop was the Ag Teacher in Coldspring for forever up until the late 70's or so. As a little kid, I remember many trips to the Ag shop with Dad when he visited Pop. The iron has a rough spot on it now and it's my fault. Dad sent me to the shop to mark some buckets one day before a stock show and instead of heating it on a propane burner, I used a torch. I got it a little too hot in one area and lost some metal. He was not happy with me. I'm still not happy about it myself.

My grandfather's brand is an old style iron made to heat in a fire. I suspect it dates back at least to the late 30's or early 40's. It is made with a long handle, meant to heat in a wood fire on the ground. The iron looks to be built from scrap found lying around the workshop. It is now slightly bent, probably from using it to keep a cow from backing up in some chute at some time or other. No two pieces of metal line up exactly in the same plane and the mark it makes shows it. This is a brand that will make an Extension Beef Cattle Specialist or an Agent flinch. It is vented adequately when viewed; however, from personal experience, it tends to concentrate heat too much in the center. Times were really hard back when this brand was built and the iron shows its history when studied. You made do with what little you had, but you got it done.

Since dad was still using his brand at the time I thought I needed one, I went ahead and built my own. Dad didn't like my iron's style when I built it. I went old school with a long handle, I didn't want to have to wear gloves just to use the iron. He said it would be in the way when in the heater; he was correct-I didn't care. He also said it was too heavy; he was correct-I built it out of what was handy in the shop that day. I think you still have to work with what you have and get the job done.

I am thankful to own these pieces of rusty scrap metal and hope to pass them down the line. Family history and folk art preserved in old pieces of iron.

Back in 1978, O.D. Butler led the initiative for Extension to record both historical and active brands from across the state of Texas on the walls in the new Animal Science, [Kleberg Building](#) at Texas A&M. Whenever I have the opportunity to walk through that part of the building, I still like to stop and look at the brands on the wall. There is something about seeing Ed Lepley & Son's Rocking E up there with my Grandfather's HC - and all our other friends from the home county.



As an educational agency, we have limited basic information regarding utilizing hot iron brands. I had wanted to provide additional detail regarding the development and use of these tools. Instead, I have found resources regarding freeze branding, electronic chips, ear tagging, chain ID's, etc. Here is an older publication titled [Beef: Individual Identification of Cattle](#) or if you may want to read something a little more technically descriptive and updated: [Livestock Branding in Oklahoma](#). Just be aware that the laws in Oklahoma are not the same as here in Texas.

We still talk about being able to ID your animals for emergency management aftermath, theft prevention, and other scenarios when being able to tell others that your animal belongs to you, but it seems that printed resources in this area have been redirected. Regardless, remember proper use and application is essential.

Hot iron or fire branding was the most commonly used method for animal identification prior to advanced technology. Advanced technology has allowed the addition of new branding techniques to become commonplace today. When a producer chooses one of these options, he should be aware of all the factors involved. Important points to know about each method include ease of application, cost, legible marking, and permanence. Such factors should be guided by the needs and personal preferences of the stockman.

A brand is defined as an indelible mark that is placed on an animal. This is accomplished by three methods with the two most popular being: hot iron or cold iron. Livestock may be branded with paint or ink; however, these are temporary methods.

A properly applied legally recorded brand is proof of ownership. In Texas, brands are recorded on the county level by the county clerk. Here is the Walker County Clerks online link for [Brands & Marks](#) Registration. A producer's brand must be recorded in each county they raise livestock and this registration must be updated every 10 years during a registration period. Failure to do so during the set period will cause forfeiture of the brand. It is important to know, you must properly record a brand before using it on an animal.

Animals may be identified by symbols, numbers, letters, or a combination of these characters. It is commonly accepted to read a brand in the following ways: 1. Left to Right, 2. Top to bottom, 3. Outside to inside. Once you are familiar with reading a brand it is a quick process, but there are a few exceptions to the rules mentioned in the previous sentence, an example would be the Rocking E which I talked about earlier.

Irons may be constructed of iron, steel, stainless steel or copper. As copper generally won't take excessive heating, it is more commonly utilized as a freeze brand. Properly designed brands should measure 4-5 inches in height, and at least 3 inches wide with a 3/16 to 3/8 inch face. Too big of a brand is a problem as it creates excessive hide damage (think loss of value added products), and too small is not good as it will concentrate heat or cold, potentially blotching and being unreadable. Calf irons can be smaller, in the 2 to 3-inch range in height with 3/16 to 1/4 inch faces. All sharp edges should be filed off and the brand should be vented. If the brand is not vented, heat will concentrate in the corners and cause blotching.

When properly constructed, a brand really can be a work of art.



If you have questions or would like more information regarding Extension Educational Programs, call us at (936) 435-2426.

*Reggie Lepley*

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Provisions from the American Disability Act will be considered when planning educational programs and activities. Please notify the Walker County Extension Office if you plan on attending an Extension Educational program and need specialized services. Notification of at least three to five days in advance is needed, so that we may have ample time to acquire resources needed to meet your needs.

Educational programs of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service are open to all people without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, genetic information or veteran status. The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas Cooperating