



Walker County Agriculture Update

February 2021

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

Are you ready for Spring to bloom?

If you have been watching the weather reports, you know we may need to prep some cold weather protection of our sensitive plant species later next week. I will again refer you to Skip Richter's excellent Frost & Freezes publication for real details and a refresher on how to protect plants properly:

<http://counties.agrilife.org/walker/files/2011/05/FrostsandFreezes-Skip-Richter.pdf>

I have been hearing from a number of gardeners making plans and prepping ground for the Spring growing season. If you did not already plant cooler season vegetables, look at your soil, and get a nutrient analysis run. Short of major pH changes, you have time to make soil adjustments as needed for those plants going in later in March or April. We have soil testing forms and bags here at the AgriLife office.

On the subject of prepping ground for planting. Be aware of the need to avoid tillage of wet soils with mechanical tillers. Structural damage can easily happen during this time of year. Machine operation at the wrong time will destroy your soil structure and will only add to the challenges of managing your garden plots and even pastureland. Once you lose natural structure, soils will tend to be "boggy" at best for a long time to come. It is even possible to go the other direction where conditions prevent soils from taking in moisture. "Talk about shooting yourself in the foot". Learn to read what your ground is telling you and turn the machine off if something is not right.

During the last Master Gardener class, I was asked about soil mixes for new gardens & raised beds. Basically, this comes down to a general 1/3 good quality topsoil, 1/3 sand, and 1/3 compost. If you need or want, the sand can be substituted with coarse perlite but keep in mind the cost of such change. As I told the class, be insistent on inspection of the topsoil prior to delivery because you need the best product you can find for these applications.

Do you keep a garden journal? You should. One of the great things about journaling your garden effort is you can track when plant rotations are needed. Reducing disease or possibly insect buildup in a specific location can be accomplished with rotation of plant families. Roughly every three years, you need to plan a rotation into your garden plots. Do it before you learn there is a problem.

If you are interested in learning more about the items I have mentioned above, here is a reference source to read: <https://agrilifeextension.tamu.edu/library/gardening/10-steps-to-vegetable-garden-success/>

Featured Upcoming Events:

2021 Auxin Specific Applicator Training

Live-Video Stream Online Meeting

February 12, 2021

7:00 AM to 8:00 AM

\$13.00 per person (1-hour Laws & Regulation CEU available)

Registration online at: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/auxin-training-tickets-139719387449?utm-campaign=social%2Cemail&utm-content=attendeeshare&utm-medium=discovery&utm-source=strongmail&utm-term=checkoutwidget>

This training is for Certified TDA Applicators & anyone that might apply a 2,4-D Choline herbicide on labeled row crops. Row crop producers intending to utilize certain dicamba herbicides (Engenia, Tavium and Xtendimax) or certain 2,4-D Choline formulations (Enlist Duo® and Enlist One™) for use on tolerant crops are required to participate in a TDA approved training annually prior to usage. This 1-hour virtual training meets the TDA requirement and provides a L&R credit. *Anyone that has already participated in this specific training will not get an additional L&R credit.

If you have questions, please contact the Brazos, Burleson, or Robertson Co AgriLife Extension office for additional info.

Lady Landowners Program (2 sessions)

Sponsored by Texas A&M AgriLife, Cass Co

February 23 & 25

Live-Video Stream Online

Registration Fee: \$15.00 per person Virtual Presentation/Must Pre-Register to Obtain the Program Link.

Registration Link: <https://agriliferegister.tamu.edu/landowner>

Session 1 (February 23, 6:00-8:00 PM)

Ag Valuations & Tax Exemptions

Basics of Land Leasing

Water Rights & Mineral Rights

Q & A Session

Session 2 (February 25, 6:00-8:00 PM)

Resources Available to Landowners

Land Use & Stocking Rates

Pesticides, Herbicides & Licensing

Herbicide Calculations & Sprayer Calibration

For more information, contact Cass Co AgriLife at (903) 756-5391.

Walker County Master Gardener Spring Plant Sale

ONLINE orders will open March 8th.

Due to COVID-19 precautions the Spring Plant Sale is going ONLINE. Look for additional details in the next newsletter; however, go ahead and place March 8th on your calendar so you will not forget to get your order in. When placing the order, you will be able to schedule your pickup time on Saturday March 13th.

Contact the Walker Co AgriLife office (936) 435-2426 for more information.

Additional Items and Information of Note:

Factors and Feeds for Supplementing Beef Cows

We have an updated publication! If you catch yourself wondering exactly what the difference is between the nutritional supplements and what fits your operation the best (usually selected based on forage availability - volume & quality - THEN cost of the product) you will want to review this publication: <https://1g92472cqoiu485bu53vpy6c-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2021/01/Factors-and-Feeds-on-Bookstore-EL-5354-New.pdf>

It is always a great day when the TAMU "Beef Cattle Browsing" news comes out and things are even better when there are topic items of interest to our Walker County beef producers. The next three items are courtesy of the TAMU Beef Extension unit.

COMPARING SYSTEMS FOR PRODUCING GRASSFED AND MODIFIED GRASSFED BEEF

Interest has increased among some consumers for grass-fed beef. To qualify for the USDA grass-fed label, "cattle must be fed only mother's milk and forage (grass and other greens) during their lifetime. The forage can be grazed or consumed as hay or other stored forage. Also, the cattle must have access to pasture "during the growing season." Various grass-fed organizations may have somewhat expanded or different requirements, some with independent inspection and verification. And there may be modifications in some systems from USDA and other requirements.

Four systems were compared using steers:

- Grown on pasture and then finished on high-concentrate rations for 140 days (CON)
- Grass-fed only for 20 months (20GF)
- Grass-fed for 20 months and then finished for 45 days (GF45)
- Grass-fed only for 25 months (GF25)

Final weights differed statistically significantly across groups, ranging from 1052 lb. for GF20 to 1377 lb. for CON. Between GF25 (1254 lb.) and GF45 (1212 lb.), there was no significant difference. Dressing percent also differed significantly across groups, 50% for GF20, 53% for GF25, 58% for GR45, and 62% for CON.

For CON, marbling scores and USDA Quality Grade (85% Choice, 15% Upper Choice) differed significantly and were higher from all other groups. In Quality Grade, GR20 (59% Select, 41% Standard) was significantly lower than other groups. Between GF25 (13% Standard, 82% Select, 6% Choice) and GR45 (85% Select, 15% Choice) there was no significant difference.

In general, as grazing time was longer and finishing time increased, total weight produced increased and Quality Grades were higher.

NOTE: Any financial differences across these four production systems were not evaluated. But if there are different costs of production for any systems, these should be assessed in regard to different prices realized, if any, for product marketed.

Source: (J. Anim. Sci. 98: Supple. 4. #68: Univ. of Calif.-Davis)

DOES KNOWLEDGE OF QUALITY GRADE AND BRANDING AFFECT CONSUMERS?

Strip loins were selected of USDA Quality Grades Select, Choice, Prime, Certified Angus Beef® (CAB), and Select from carcasses from cattle classified live based on appearance as Angus (Angus Select). A consumer taste panel evaluated steaks cut 1-inch thick for tenderness, juiciness, flavor, and overall liking. Two comparisons were conducted. In the first, taste panelists were not informed before tasting of source of a sample. In the second, panelists were told in advance of tasting of Quality Grade or CAB branding of samples being evaluated.

If panelists did not know source of their sample before tasting, CAB did not rate statistically significantly higher than Choice for any palatability traits. Similarly, there was no significant difference in palatability traits between Select and Angus Select when source was unknown.

But if panelists knew source before tasting, Angus Select rated significantly higher than Select and CAB rated significantly higher than Choice for all traits except tenderness, Prime rated significantly higher for flavor and overall liking. If panelists knew samples were known to be Angus Select, ratings were significantly higher than Select for flavor and overall. But there were no significant differences between Select and Choice when source was known.

Based on this study, when source of product was known, consumer impressions were higher for CAB and Prime, as well as for Select when known to be produced from cattle identified live as Angus. But this was not the case when panelists compared Select and Choice from known sources. So, are consumers affected by knowing the source of a steak? The answer to that question is, "It Depends".

Source: (J. Anim. Sci. 94: 11, p.4930; Kansas St. Univ.)

VIRTUAL PERSPECTIVES OF MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES FOR PASTURES AND BEEF CATTLE: WHAT TO LOOK FOR

The most important consideration of any pasture-based livestock operation is the hardiness and vegetational zone in which the operation is based.

Some of the components that need to be considered or evaluated are:

1. Soil testing to determine specific needs for fertilizer and perhaps limestone. A soil test is the best investment for efficient and economical forage production. Soil type, topography and even recommended stocking rates can be seen at <https://websoilsurvey.sc.egov.usda.gov> (or type "web soil survey")
2. Identification of forage species and overall pasture conditions considering forage cover and weed invasion. Forage species determine stocking rates.
3. Location and condition of cattle working facilities including alley ways for gathering livestock.
4. Availability and location of water sources relative to number of animals and size of pastures.
5. Fencing (amount and type) to set the number and size of pastures for grazing.
6. Grazing system for flexible stocking approach.
7. Stocking rate that offers sustainability of soil and pastures with variable livestock numbers to match forage production.
8. Decision on animal types to include calving season and grazing seasons and supplementation requirements.

Dr. Rouquette indicated that the most useful factors to "look for" in forages include forage height, grazing pattern (especially evidence of "selective" grazing, and animal body condition. Selective grazing is an indicator of forage refusal based on palatability of forage species and stocking rate. With respect to animal performance, cow body condition score is the most useful visual assessment of what to "look for" as a before and after the fact management indicator of nutrition.

Source: Rouquette, M. 2020. Research Center Tech. Rept. 2020-4.

<https://overton.tamu.edu/files/2020/08/RCTR-2020-4-Virtual-Perspectives-of-management-strategies-for-pastures.pdf>

In This Issue:

DOES LAND MANAGEMENT FIT YOUR HEAD?

Does it really fit you...?

“Is there something wrong with your hat?”, she asked. This was about 40 minutes into our travel. I had been repeatedly mashing and re-crimping the front brim crease since we climbed in the truck. “No...well not really”, I replied. “So why in the world do you keep messing with it?”, she said.

I thought about it briefly and with measured care said, “Something just isn’t right.”

This statement concerned her greatly. I immediately noticed I got a look, which I totally expected.

The reason for her great concern was, at that moment I was wearing a hat she had given me during Christmas many years ago. She had always been proud of this hat and her ability to give it as a gift. This is, without a doubt the most expensive hat I own, and I have a nice collection of felt hats.

With exception of this particular hat, I place felt cowboy hats squarely in the class of tools and not that of “fashion” or “lifestyle”. I figure that is what a lot of non-cowboy hat wearers think, who knows. I think if I am correct, they have no real clue as to why anybody wears a hat.

The hat under discussion was a silverbelly with more than the average number of X’s stamped on the inside band. Due to the known cost of this headwear and my fear of damaging it; it is rarely worn for excursions into the world. She had the hat completely custom-built from the ground up just for me – it fits outstandingly and feels unbelievable.

The best analogy I can offer to describe this is imagine you have lived your life riding run-of-the-mill cow horses with a basic to better than good handle on them, and then step on a truly finished and superbly tuned, smooth as silk performance horse. I had that exact feeling on the first really outstanding horse I ever rode-did not know they could be like that. The jump in quality is so high it is really hard to describe unless you have sat in that saddle or worn such a hat.

Sometime along about there she told me if I did not stop “messing” with that hat, she was going to pull over and put both me and the hat out of the truck. Not wanting to walk (she was driving), I made myself leave the brim of the hat alone and found something else to focus on which seemed to eventually irritate her also but well short of the walking threat level. Sometimes traveling with your spouse is...

At some point later during the trip our topic of discussion changed when she looked at me and asked me if I would be able to “get the kid a good buck this year?”. I heard it not so much as a question, but as a statement.

DOES LAND MANAGEMENT FIT YOUR HEAD?

By Reggie Lepley

Just so you know, I will relate a hunting story in this article, but I am not talking about hunting. This is just a means to get you thinking about what fits your need and how good hats fit into the world of those who need them. Actually, for full disclosure, this about setting yourself up to make quick real-world/hard decisions, learning life lessons, and choosing individualized land management options. So, with that.

Several weeks and more “water under the bridge” after our trip with the good “dress” hat I was driving to the deer camp and had grabbed an old silverbelly-felt off the hat rack as I walked out the door. I had noticed a need to change things up with a different hat.

On the way out of the house, I had made the mistake of walking in front of a mirror. Something with that image bothered me and I could not let it go. Driving down the road I found myself returning to the “what is wrong here” thought. Turning the radio up did not help. It hit me about then so, I started trying to adjust the crown of this everyday wearer-sometimes hunting hat as I drove further. “*Something just isn’t right*”, I kept thinking.

“*This may just lead into a segue*”, I actually thought to myself and a newsletter topic developed.

I never consider myself superstitious but sometimes the need builds to go a different direction. Prior to Thanksgiving I failed miserably to get my daughter on a good deer. Hat change required.

Using the best tools at hand (game camera), I had placed her at a stand where several good bucks had frequented. I noticed as she walked into the stand site, she wisely stayed to the side of the road. *Wonder where she learned that?*

We have requirements on the property with doe harvest mandating one be taken at some point. Four days into this hunt, with a move of being proactive, I left the kid in prime position and I moved about a mile down the road to find a harvestable doe. About two hours into my doe hunt, guess who walked out in front of me.

It was by far the best of the three good ones I was trying to get in front of the kid. Darn it!

The problem with hunting land which you have no management control of, is that you have to take opportunities as presented. Without management authority, you find yourself playing by other people’s rules. These rules sometimes include the fact that whoever first sees this animal has options of taking him home to meet their freezer so long as he fits the guidelines set by the land manager. If you choose to let him continue on his way there is less than zero guarantee that he will end his travels at the point where your kid a mile down the road will ever see him.

On that trip, I was wearing my favorite felt hunting hat. This black-felt is probably (*a conservative guess*) 30+ years old and still extremely serviceable. Quality hats will last a long time if you do not lose them under the pasture shredder; *I own that story also*.

I had to make a quick and lasting decision about this mature, big ten point with extremely tall brow tines. A decision which I knew would afterwards include a phone call to the kid sitting a mile down the road. Furthermore, and of even greater concern there would be a phone call to the lady that bought that really expensive hat.

Without a doubt, I knew both phone calls would not be easy.

Just so you know the back story, I had found myself positioned having to “take up slack” in the trigger the year before also. On that day, the kid and I were walking down the road going to the deer stand on a nice bright fall day, she in the middle of the road and I on the edge.



We all saw each other at the same time; a very large bodied mature eight point some hundred and sixty plus yards distant, the kid, and me. All the participants in this action frame instantly froze in place. Everybody just stood and stared at each other.

The difference was he could not tell exactly what he had just seen. He knew he did not like what he was seeing but... Having had personal experience with being in just this situation several times before, I quietly asked the kid if she could see him good and if she would be comfortable shooting without anything to support on. Her reply reminded me of how near-sighted my kid really is. Darn it!

"Ok, stay where you are – Don't move", I told her.

With that, I slowly stepped a half step sideways to the tree line which put me behind a pine tree from the big bodied eight point. Taking a rest against the pine the down range distance reduced quickly by the solid copper bullet at nearly two and a half times the speed of sound.

Leaning against the tree, I looked over at the kid and remember saying, "Never, never walk down the middle of the road." As a parent there are multitudes of things you are not sure your kids will remember – *this one sunk home*.

Afterward, the kid took photos for me then sat on the stand and collected a doe while I tended to the buck back at camp. At some point later, I called the lady who bought me the fancy silverbelly-felt cowboy "dress" hat with multiple rows of X's and told her how it all went down.

Maybe you can now understand why I said I failed miserably this past hunting season. I was going to have to ask the kid to take another set of photos of a great buck and me with my very same, old worn-out, ugly, black-felt hat. Two years in a row now. And me all-the-while considering that black-felt my "lucky" hunting hat.

Earlier that hunting season, my lovely spouse (*the fancy hat buying lady*) had actually told me I needed a new hunting hat because my black-felt hat was looking "worn-out", and "ugly". I attempted to ignore the insult to my old friend.

Hats are extremely personal objects for those of us who wear them regularly. The old song about "The Cowboy's Hat" is the real thing. You just do not mess with someone else's hat, period. Doing so could easily damage a friendship and surely start a "knock-down", "drag-out" fight with a stranger.

I know people who wear some really awful looking hats but that is totally their business. A few of my hats may not look so good as well, but for me they totally fit. Get over it and move along.

If it fits your need, that is all that matters. Fitting a felt cowboy hat for an individual is a lot like fitting a management plan with multiple options to a landowner.

To start with, there are many brand names out there. You may find surprise that some hats are actually built by one company and another company(s) mark is then placed inside the band. If you did not already know that and you plan a big-named cowboy hat investment, do a little research to educate yourself so you know what is really sitting on your head.

So, how much different can they be, you ask?

The answer is very different. Much like land management tools, hats can meet very different specifications depending on the needs of the person wearing it, though they may look similar. Some are heavier in material weight and some more rigid, either of which may actually be a good thing or not. Some hats hold up better to water, wind and heat exposure which is always a good thing. Similarly, some hats tend to simply hold their shape over the years better than others.

In looking through my collection I notice that I own a variety of felt hats. A listing of brand names alphabetically would feature American Hats, Catalena Hatters, Resistol, and Stetson. I own at least two of each and three of some.

If you like simple logic-based word math problems, you just figured out that I may own between nine to ten felt hats-hmm..., *I have never really counted*. Guess that means I am a collector of hats. I have four to five that I wear regularly, but only three normally make it to the office with me, maybe add two more to that list depending on field-based activities planned later for that day. There are only three of these felt hats that ever go into the cow-lot with me. Cool-weather stock shows or horse shows have a dedicated choice set as well, these being typically a bit on the nicer side than the cow-lot set or normal choices for hunting excursions.

I have one all-time favorite...for several quantitative personal reasons. It is unique among the stable.

If you wonder what I would do if I had the wrong hat and got into an unplanned activity: well, that is why there should always be a baseball cap in the truck to protect my bald head.

I somehow feel the need to not let my wife know how my hats fall into my real wearing priority list. These old friends may get some age on them, but I still like having them around. I consider myself loyal to those deserving of such treatment.

Sounds somewhat like I am talking about people...

I can easily and quickly rearrange my felt hats by variations ranking quality, longevity, fit, comfort (yes-I say that is even different from fit), shape, weather conditions, use, color, and my preference based on activity of the day.

Selecting land management tools is exactly like selecting a hat for the day or the trip at hand. Which brush control methods can you use; do you need to do that to begin with? The same goes for grass planting, grazing rotation, fencing needs, or weed spraying. Should you do a timber harvest and when does this need to occur to meet the end goal? Where and how do you direct the water? The list of management options for landowners is truly endless.

Selecting the correct tool totally depends on where you want to go and what you want to accomplish.

When first fitting and selecting your hat based on the perceived need, a change in dimension will always be called for. Without a doubt, each new hat's crease of crown or brim needs moving in, or out, up, or down. Some brims likely need trimming or even lots of cutting down just as crowns are too tall or possibly too short depending on who is wearing the hat. What about head shape; oval or long oval. Maybe even squared up slightly for some. *Gosh, did I say that out loud?* My sincere apologies if you may know someone with that kind of shape going on there.

I do have a real recommendation here: Never buy a pre-shaped hat! Just do not do that, it will never fit you for comfort or shape. If you have a true feel for what you are wearing you will never be happy with it. A bit of steam will always help you get the exact shape you need so everything is just right for you

personally. Make sure the person on the steamer really knows what they are doing and more importantly, why they are moving that felt around.

Similarly, there are resources out there to help you find the tools you need to fit into your land management toolbox. In Walker County, we are fortunate to have offices of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, Texas A&M Forest Service, Texas Parks & Wildlife, and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. We all make up a great team for landowners. Depending on which direction you want to set your goals, any or all these agencies have a variety of information and resources to help.

I have mentioned I place hats in the tool group; select them based on the use they will see.

Much like your personal toolbox of land management practices, select options that fit where you want to go. Your direction or goal can and will change often by a little to even a lot depending on circumstances, weather, time of year or a specific job at hand. When something changes, open the toolbox, and pull out the right tool for the job.

All things are not equal with all hats or land management tools. Just so you know, the number of X's stamped in a hat may or may not show the real quality of the end product. This is a number with no real industry standard. So, do your research and learn all that you can. Take nothing for granted. Just because something looks good, it may not get you where you need to go at the end of the day. Do your research and understand your options.

As you gather your tools, learn to handle, and use them correctly. Never set that hat brimside down, or for gosh-sakes, on a bed. *Those that know, just nodded in agreement.*

Always expect to make a bit of adjustment from time to time, when "Something isn't just right".

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



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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.

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