

Clay County Agriculture News

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Upcoming Programs to Offer CEUs

Save the date for the 30th annual **Texoma Ag Seminar** which will be held on Thursday, February 26. The Clay Beef Committee is trying a new format this year to try to increase participation and producer-vendor interaction. This year the Grazing Hour will be held first from 4:30 to 6 pm at the Holman Center in Henrietta. The educational workshops will follow immediately from 6 to 8 pm at the Rock Barn.

Topics for the workshops will include beef cattle parasite control, rangeland stewardship and pesticide laws and regulations. Two CEUs will be available to private applicator pesticide license holders, one in laws and regulations and one general.

We look forward to the same quality information to be presented as in past years and some excellent door prizes will be given away during the workshops. The Grazing Hour will continue the tradition of good food and fellowship as well as quality entertainment. We hope that you will join us on February 26.

And on March 4-5 the **Wichita Falls Farm and Ranch Show** will take place at the J.S. Bridwell Ag Center, 111 N Burnett St.

Educational activities each day will provide three TDA continuing education units for private pesticide applicators. CEUs will be offered in drift management, IPM, laws and regulations and the general categories. Registration is \$10 for the sessions that include CEUs.

Ag-Vocating for Agriculture will be a highlight of the two-day event at a free breakfast at 7 am on March 4. Guest speakers will be Aaron Alejandro, Texas FFA Foundation executive director, Wichita Falls, and Dr. Chris Boleman, AgriLife Extension assistant director and 4-H youth development leader, College Station.

The first day's lineup will include building soil health, saving soil moisture, cotton variety, managing glyphosate resistant weeds and a drift management demonstration. The second day will be split between a focus on cattle and range in concurrent sessions. For the cattle portion, Dr. Ron Gill, AgriLife Extension animal science program leader from College Station, will provide a low-stress cattle handling demonstration and a live bull evaluation.

More information is available at <http://www.starexpos.net> or by contacting Graf at 940.716.8616.

Soundness Exams, Genetic Testing Improve Herd Performance

The value of a herd bull is determined not just by his genetic merit, but also by the number of calves he may not sire. Emerging DNA technology offers the opportunity to identify genetic markers for traits of interest and identify individual sires used in multiple-sire breeding pastures, said Dr. Bruce Carpenter, AgriLife Extension livestock specialist at Fort Stockton.

There is a lot of variability that can't be managed in herds, so producers should do what they can to manage the variability that can be managed and that begins with an annual breeding soundness exam of all herd bulls. The breeding soundness exam performed by a qualified vet is the best and most practical predictor of potential fertility. However, it is not a fertility guarantee.

There are reasons why some bulls don't perform, Carpenter said, and with new genetic testing technology, researchers are learning more about this.

It is often said the bull is half the calf crop, but that's not always true – he can be more or less. And if he is genetically superior, that is great if he is more. But if he provides less desirable traits, but is siring 70 to 80 percent of the calves, that is not good.

"If you are just hauling pounds of beef to the sale ring, the most valuable bull may not be the one with the best genetics," Carpenter said. "It's the one that puts the most calves on the ground."

In large-scale studies from California and Australia, the bulls passed a breeding soundness exam, so that potential variable was removed. There were some bulls in California that sired a lot of calves, which made them more valuable than those which possessed superior genetics but provided fewer calves to sell. In another California study, steers from 16 different bulls were sold at 10 months of age. Carcass premiums averaged \$721 and were similar for all bulls. Producers certainly valued the premiums, due to good carcass genetics, but when researchers identified which bulls were actually siring the calves, it ranged from a low of seven to a high of seventy-seven steers sold per bull over five calf crops. Because of the variability among individual bulls in number of calves sired, contributions to gross income ranged from \$4,881 to \$55,889.

In a 5,000-calf study, the average number of calves sired across all bulls was nineteen, but it found that four percent of all the bulls sired no calves and one bull sired 62 calves in one calf crop. In twenty percent of all the herds evaluated, there was one bull in the bull battery that sired only one calf. But, in another twenty percent of the herds, there was one bull that sired fifty calves or more.

"That's direct proof of what we've always suspected, that stocking should be at about one mature bull per twenty-five cows, and one to fifteen if using yearling bulls," Carpenter said. "If you don't know much about a group of bulls, this would be a good rule of thumb."

There can be much variability on the bull side of the equation that is hard to manage, but it is certainly worth being aware of. And genetic testing, while not cheap, may be a consideration in some situations; the most common probably being for multiple-sire registered operations. A sire test for paternity is about \$18 per sample per calf and bulls.

This sounds expensive but if a herd is experiencing low calf crops, and the usual suspects like disease and poor semen quality have been eliminated, sire testing is an option that might help explain what might be going on in a pasture. It might be useful to know who was getting the job done and who wasn't.

For the most part, bulls in the California study remained as they were assessed. But testing in following years revealed that some yearlings, and even older bulls can and do change from their initial test.

"We've always known that there are studs and there are duds out there, but these studies quantified it," Carpenter concluded.