

Clay County Agriculture News

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Cattle Trails Wheat & Stocker Conference set July 29 in Wichita Falls

In an effort to bring producers new research and technology based on ever-changing environmental conditions, the Cattle Trails Wheat and Stocker Cattle Conference will be held July 29 in Wichita Falls, jointly hosted by AgriLife Extension and the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service.

Stan Bevers, AgriLife Extension economist at Vernon said the conference offers the most up-to-date information on topics and tools that might help producers reach the conference's slogan, "driving your cattle to profits." Bevers said forecast for El Nino development offer some hope for this falls' wheat planting conditions and for the potential for fall grazing of stocker cattle.

The conference, which alternates between Texas and Oklahoma each year, will be from 8 am to 2 pm at the MPEC, 1000 5th St, Wichita Falls. Registration is \$25 per person and includes educational materials, a noon meal and refreshments. Producers are encouraged to preregister by contacting their local extension office.

The keynote speaker for the event will be Dr. Joe Outlaw, co-director of the Agricultural and Food Policy Center at Texas A&M University and AgriLife Extension economist from College Station.

Outlaw frequently interacted with members of Congress during the recent farm bill debate and during its implementation across the country, Bevers said. His discussion will focus on the farm bill, the policy center's software decision aide, and how the farm bill impact will influence area wheat producers' income.

The program will also include the following speakers and topics:

- Bevers, expectations for the wheat and stocker cattle markets.
- Dr. Chris Richards, Oklahoma State University, nutrition and health of stocker cattle
- Dr. Mark Gregory, Oklahoma Cooperative Extension agronomist, update on wheat forage and varieties.
- Dr. Tom Hairgrove, veterinarian and AgriLife Extension animal health specialist and program coordinator in College Station, stocker cattle health management and the use of antibiotics in food animals.

Industry sponsors will have their products on display during the event. For more information contact the extension office at 538.5042 or go to <http://agrisk.tamu.edu>.

Feral Hog Update

A USDA/APHIS/WS Feral Swine Control Initiative has been funded to the tune of \$20 million in federal funds. The states (via Wildlife Services) with wild pig populations will receive about half the allocation based on plans they submitted and the severity of pig populations in each of those states. Other funded activities will include disease monitoring and new vaccination methods of wild pigs, research and economic analysis to improve control methods, centralization of control operations and surveillance of diseases of most concern to the US pork industry. Plans are underway to begin monitoring for Porcine Epidemic Diarrhea (PED), though there is no evidence that the disease has been transmitted to feral hogs at this time. PED was discovered in domestic pig herds last year in the US. A control pilot program in New Mexico has eliminated wild pigs from over 5 million acres in that state and this pilot will be applied to other states, particularly those like New Mexico that have just recently had pig populations establish and problems emerge. With this earmarked federal funding, USDA/APHIS/WS has a goal of eliminating wild pig populations in two states every 3 to 5 years and stabilize damage nationwide within 10 years. Therefore, efforts will

likely be concentrated in states with new or emerging wild pig populations first, although states with well-established pig populations (e.g., TX) will also be funded via state Wildlife Services as previously described.

The research on new control tools does include the continued investigation of sodium nitrite (SN) as a potential wild pig toxicant. Research on this compound, which is already being used as a toxicant for wild pig control in Australia, has been ongoing in the states for several years. Pigs have a sensitivity to SN, which appears to work quickly. Less than one hour after a pig ingests a lethal dose of SN, by forming methemoglobin, the pigs cannot incorporate oxygen into their bloodstream. They simply go to sleep and don't wake up. SN metabolizes quickly, therefore any scavenger that feeds on a carcass will not likely be impacted.

Certain wildlife species that are capable of accessing SN baits in feeders (e.g., raccoons, bears) are also at risk. In addition to toxicity trials mandated by EPA, research efforts are also evaluating delivery devices that only wild pigs can operate to access the baits containing SN. There also appears to be some palatability issues with the current baits, so research continues there as well. The important point to remember now is that there is no compound, product or toxicant that is approved and/or legal for the use of killing feral hogs at this time.

Cattle Industry Veteran Suggests Change in Paradigm

Burke Teichert, retired vice president and general manager of Deseret Land and Cattle, suggests a change is needed in ranchers' approach to management. The following is based on an article he wrote that appeared in a Beef Magazine Blog.

After speaking and consulting with a number of ranchers and thinking about his own past approach, Teichert is convinced that most ranchers give their cattle the highest priority, followed by grass while little effort is given to the soil. He suggests that is backwards. According to Teichert, we should think soil first, as all life springs from the soil. "Our livestock can be a powerful tool to improve or damage the soil, and too many of us don't think about which we are doing." We just graze cattle usually for the benefit of the cattle, and maybe the grass, with little attention to the effect on the soil. But livestock can be used as a tool to improve soil organic matter, increase water infiltration rates, improve soil moisture holding capability and improve nutrient cycling. This can be done, and then grass productivity improves.

Teichert believes that in addition to seeing livestock for their endpoint value, ranchers need to see them as a powerful tool for soil improvement and then grass improvement. In this context, grass includes anything livestock and wildlife will eat – grass, forbs and shrubs. When a short period of grazing is followed by an opportunity for the grazed plant(s) to fully recover before grazed again, and when the animals help to lay litter on the soil surface trampling some into the soil, and when animals spread their dung and urine on the very areas they graze, soils begin to improve.

As soils improve there will be an increase in biodiversity above and below the soil surface. There should be a greater variety of plants with different depths of rooting. Some will grow early and some will grow late, while others will grow when it's hot. There also will be an increasing variety of soil micro-organisms and animal life. This complex web of interdependency, if properly managed, will continue to improve the soil and its ability to feed livestock.

While cattle should be managed for their endpoint value, it must be put in an appropriate context. If soil building and soil protection is not one of the first considerations in developing a strategic plan for a ranch, it will probably be ignored.

Cattle operations must be flexible to accommodate good grass and pasture management. This often means that the same event (calving, breeding, branding, weaning, etc.) will not happen in the same place each year, but the end results for cattle can still be good. Livestock management must fit the grass management, and the grass management must fit the objectives for soil health and soil improvement.

Always remember that livestock are a powerful tool for management of the soil. They can be used for improvement or regression. In closing, Teichert says "let's change the paradigm from livestock-grass-soil to soil-grass-livestock."