

LIBERTY COUNTY AG HAPPENINGS



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It's winter...sort of.

Hopefully everyone made it through the first hard freeze of the season and 2016. Southeast Texas winters can be particularly mild, but can see some brutal "cold snaps" as my dad used to say. The day the cold weather actually set in, I was in the field with a producer checking some winter pasture he planted for a variety trial results demonstration. Through the course of the day we endured dropping temperatures to the point of freezing, blustery north winds, heard thunder, got rained on, and as we made our final observations for the day, it began to sleet and occasionally you could see a snow flurry. As I write today, approximately one week later- it is a balmy 75. There's an old saying, "If you don't like Texas weather, just wait a minute." The weather is just one of the many variables of production agriculture. In 2015, Liberty County saw 90 inches of rain. By May of 2016, we had 60 to 70 inches across different parts of the county, only to go almost 45 days through the summer for some folks without seeing any rainfall. Most of Liberty County has seen an average of ten inches for January, so we should be in good shape for spring pastures getting ready to come about.

Calving season, cow herd replacements, bull replacements, equipment purchases and replacements, all are on the horizon with spring as well. Let the auctions begin. If you need it (whatever IT is), there will be an auction for IT in the near future. Some of you may already be into full blown calving season. Southern Livestock Standard has an excellent article on knowing the calving signs. If you do not subscribe to this publication, I highly recommend it. Knowing what to do may save a calf, which returns a dollar. Knowing how to save the cow keeps you from losing more dollars. A swollen vulva, exceptionally full udders, nervous mannerisms and secluded behavior are signs of the upcoming "big event." Keeping a watchful eye, being ready to assist, and having the vet on speed dial are all recommended precautions, especially where first-calf heifer are involved. Hopefully you have kept the heifers apart from your larger herd while they were growing, and used a separate "heifer bull" for their first experience. If you are not sure what all that is in reference too, come by the office or call me for a sight visit. I'll bet you a cup of coffee you sleep better next year. Maintaining your herd bulls is also of great importance. I have attached an interesting article on "Optimal Bull Fertility" by Dr. Joe Paschal. If you are also in the process of composing or updating your annual farm budget, this is a link with some tools assist in the economic decision making process: <http://agecoext.tamu.edu/2017-district-11-texas-crop-and-livestock-budgets/>

Unfortunately with the warmer winter, we are seeing resurgence in the Texas Fever Tick. Most of you may know about the fever tick but never really think about it because it is usually confined to the Permanent Quarantine Zone (PQZ) along the Rio Grande River from Del Rio to Brownsville with occasional movements outside caused by deer or other cervids or antelope (Nilgai in Cameron, Willacy and Kenedy/Kleberg counties). The four counties listed have portions that are now Controlled Purpose Quarantine Areas (CPQA).

We have a lot of different ticks in South Texas so just because you see a tick, don't assume that it is or is not a fever tick. Collect them (live if possible) and send them to the TAHC. The best way to control ticks on cattle are tick tags and the best way to control ticks in your pasture is through good grazing and brush management. Sometimes in really bad infestations, a slow hot fire is successful. Ranchers with good herd health management programs usually have fewer problems with any ticks. Attached is a Texas Animal Health Commission Situation Report and update. The fever tick (there are actually two species) is not the cause of the tick fever, it is merely the host to a protozoa called Babesia which causes the disease which destroys red blood cells. About 90% of the cattle that contract Babesiosis get sick and have a high mortality. We try to control the ticks so they can't carry the fever. Mexico has both the fever ticks as well as Babesiosis according to USDA and TAHC. If Texas cannot control this outbreak, there could be a quarantine or restriction of livestock movement out of the state by USDA which would have a hundred million dollar impact so this is really a serious situation. (Dr. Joe Paschal, Texas A&M AgriLife Livestock Specialist, 2017).

Well, even though it's winter, no time to slow down. Be watching for future communication on upcoming educational programs for this year. We will have some Landowner Management Series, featuring tax valuation options, production and management practices, herd rebuilding, and hopefully some field and production tours. Keep up to date with our ag page blog and updates as well. See you down the road or out in the pasture.....

<http://liberty.agrilife.org/ag-publications/>

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LIBERTY COUNTY JUNIOR MASTER GARDENERS



The **Junior Master Gardener** program is committed to helping young people become gardeners and contributing citizens. This program's curriculum provides a hands on approach to learning horticulture, science and nature along with leadership and life skills.

The **Garden Whisperers** are a group of eleven youth from the Trinity Trailblazer 4-H Club who are led by Liberty County Master Gardeners Donna Capps and Angelia Garvin along with Better Living for Texans Program Extension Assistant, Ladd Hight. Donna, Ladd, and Angelia work with the students on a weekly basis to share knowledge of the best practices in food and garden education. The Garden Whisperers are a group of young students that range in age from 5-14 and are part of the homeschool community in Liberty County. We are excited about this program and are eager to share our adventures in the garden with these students. This is the first year that the group has participated in the JMG® program. This group has shown how versatile the JMG® curriculum can be and how easy it can serve any child interested in gardening.

Donna Capps

Liberty County Master Gardener



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.

Persons with disabilities who plan to attend the event, and who may need auxiliary aids or services, are requested to contact the Extension Office in Liberty County at 936-334-3230 prior to the event so appropriate arrangements can be made.



Maintaining Optimal Bull Fertility

Joe C. Paschal
Livestock Specialist
Texas A&M AgriLife Extension
Corpus Christi, Texas



Breeding season is almost here for most of us and I thought it might be a good time to relate some basic points on maintaining optimal bull fertility.

Bulls need to be fertility tested about 45-60 days prior to turnout. This allows ample time for retesting or replacement. Bulls should be vaccinated for diseases and treated for internal and external parasites at this time. Visit with your local veterinarian for specific recommendations for your area.

If you have purchased or acquired new bulls they should be trichomoniasis tested when they are fertility tested before purchase. Trich is a venereal of cattle that is carried by bulls but causes early abortion in cows. It is recommended and required by state law that breeding bulls be tested whenever they change hands. There is a vaccine labeled for use in healthy animals that reduces the effect of the disease on aborting those early pregnancies. Some veterinarians are recommending its use when a fertility test is conducted.

At turnout, bulls should be in a body condition score of 7, with no ribs showing and hips or hooks and pins rounded. Bulls will lose about 2 condition scores during a 3 month breeding season so they should begin with some fat cover. If bulls lose weight during breeding season supplement or replace them. Thin bulls produce less and a lower quality semen.

The bull to cow or breeding ratio will depend on the age of the bull as well as the pasture conditions. For young bulls, those less than 24 months of age, a good rule of thumb is a cow for every month of age. Older bulls can be turned out with 20-35 or more cows depending on pasture size, pasture conditions, and age of the bulls.

Bulls reach their sexual peak at about 4-5 years of age and begin to decline after about 7 years of age. There will be exceptions to this of course.

For more information:

Bull Management for Cow Calf Producers <http://animalscience.tamu.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2012/04/beef-bull-mgmt.pdf>

Breeding Soundness of Bulls <http://animalscience.tamu.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2012/04/beef-breeding-soundness-bulls.pdf>

Bovine Trichomoniasis <http://animalscience.tamu.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2012/04/beef-bovine-trichomoniasis.pdf>



FEVER TICKS

Joe C. Paschal
Livestock Specialist
Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service

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We have a lot of different ticks in South Texas so just because you see a tick, don't assume that it is or is not a fever tick. Collect them (live if possible) and send them to the TAHC. The best way to control ticks on cattle are tick tags and the best way to control ticks in your pasture is through good grazing and brush management. Sometimes in really bad infestations, a slow hot fire is successful. Ranchers with good herd health management programs usually have fewer problems with any ticks.

Fever ticks once ranged as far north as Virginia and in 1906 the forerunner of the USDA, the Bureau of Animal Industry, began an national campaign to eradicate the tick from the US. By the 1940s, the tick had been eradicated to the southwestern boundary of Texas running from Del Rio to Brownsville, this was designated as the PQZ. Livestock in the PQZ have to be dipped or sprayed with Coumaphos (Corral) before they can be moved. At one time it was thought that the tick only fed on cattle, it is now known that it will feed on deer (and other cervids) and antelope (like Nilgai) and can be carried far from the PQZ. The ticks (both species) are one host, the female engorges blood along the brisket, elbow, flank and perianal regions where the hide is thinnest. Males can be found crawling anywhere on the hide.

A number of factors (long term) have contributed to an increase in the outbreaks including reduction in grasslands (which ticks dislike) and increase in brush (which ticks love) for hunting, hunting (hunters don't worry about ticks on deer and deer managers may not know about them), increase in wildlife populations (no screwworms, better habitat management, warmer weather), absentee landownership, and of course cattle producers who for lack of knowledge or management don't know about ticks (the major cause in my opinion)

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I would suggest you read the summary and see if your county is on any of the lists and then go to the link and read the TAHC bulletin. There is no easy fix so awareness and prevention are important. It is not economically sustainable to gather and dip (or spray) cattle every two weeks or to gather and inject with Doramectin every 25-28 days for 6-9 months. Vacating a premise for 6-9 months won't work either if there are other hosts for the ticks (like deer or Nilgai). Both those are the options required by TAHC.

Statewide Quarantine Summary

129 Infested Quarantined Premises:

- 46 permanent quarantine zone premises
- 83 non-permanent quarantine zone premises
- Counties with infested premises quarantines include: Cameron, Kleberg, Live Oak, Maverick, Starr, Webb, Willacy and Zapata

92 Exposed Quarantined Premises:

- 41 permanent quarantine zone premises
- 51 non-permanent quarantine zone premises

2,024 Adjacent/Check Quarantined Premises:

- 314 permanent quarantine zone premises
- 1,710 non-permanent quarantine zone premises

Counties with exposed, adjacent or check premises quarantines: Bastrop, Bee, Caldwell, Calhoun, Cameron, Colorado, Denton, Dewitt, Dimmit, Falls, Fayette, Frio, Goliad, Gonzales, Hidalgo, Jim Wells, Karnes, Kendall, Kinney, Kleberg, Live Oak, Maverick, McMullen, Milam, Mills, Runnels, Starr, Uvalde, Val Verde, Webb, Wharton, Willacy and Zapata.

For more information regarding the fever tick program and terminology used, please visit <http://www.tahc.texas.gov/news/brochures/>