MCCULLOCH COUNTY AG NEWSLETTER

MARCH

MILLERSVIEW WHEAT TOUR

It is getting to that time of the year for the Annual Millersview Wheat Tour. The Wheat Tour will be held Thursday May 2, 2019 at the Millersview Gymnasium. Various speakers and topics will be there, a panel of producers on no till farming, and a tour of the small grain's demonstration plots will all be available at the tour. The Wheat Tour will be free of charge to producers, includes 5 Texas Department of Agriculture Continuing Education Units (CEU's), and a free catered catfish lunch from Boondocks in Brady. Please stay tuned for more information on speakers and topics.

PREDATORS DURING LAMBING AND CALVING SEASON

Keeping livestock confined in pens or corrals may prevent predation, but it's not very practical in most cases. Corralling livestock only at night, however, may be more feasible and is also effective in reducing losses because many predators, such as the coyote, often hunt at night. Lighting the corral can further reduce the possibility of a predator attack. Producers need to be especially vigilant in the spring. The fact that spring lambing coincides with coyote birthing can lead to high predation because coyotes need to feed their pups. To counteract this threat, more and more producers are turning to shed lambing. Before a ewe gives birth, she is moved indoors to a confined space, where she will remain with her lambs for several weeks. In addition to protecting against predators, shed lambing can also reduce newborn losses due to inclement weather. Because of their size and lack of strength, young livestock are especially vulnerable to predators during the spring and summer. Shed lambing serves to give them a fighting chance. In addition, producers can avoid using pastures with a history of predation. Pastures closer to buildings and human activity can be safer for young livestock. Pastures with rough terrain or dense vegetation borders tend to provide predators with advantageous cover. Some producers also put bells on their sheep to discourage predators and alert herders or ranch hands to disturbances in the flock.

In increasing numbers, livestock producers are using guard animals in their pastures and on open ranges to prevent predator attacks. Guard animals include dogs, donkeys, llamas, and mules. Dogs are by far the most popular of the protective animals, although llamas, which guard by intimidation, are also gaining favor with producers. The most effective guard dogs are Eurasian breeds, such as the Akbash and Great Pyrenees. A good livestock guarding dog stays with the animals without harming them and aggressively repels predators. A guard dog is not a herding dog but rather a full-time member of the flock that has bonded with the animals in the herd, usually sheep. The protective behaviors of guard dogs are largely instinctive, but they can be effective in preventing predator, especially coyote, attacks. Guard dogs don't solve the problem, however; they just prevent isolated attacks. In their efforts to protect livestock, guard dogs are also vulnerable to attack themselves. The number of dogs needed to protect a flock depends on its size, the local terrain, and the livestock species onsite.

nces Excluding coyotes by putting up fencing, especially in large areas, is expensive but can offer some protection. Many coyotes, however, learn to dig deeper or climb higher to defeat a fence. To be effective,

the fence should be about 5.5 feet high to keep the predators from jumping over, and a buried wire apron or barbed wire at ground level can discourage digging. Producers can also install electric fencing to keep predators from climbing over. Livestock managers should carefully consider a variety of factors, such as the type of terrain and size of the pasture, before deciding whether to build a fence. Fencing is most likely to be cost effective when the potential for predation is high and fencing can be incorporated with other means of predator management. For example, guard dogs and fencing used together achieve a higher rate of success than either alone. Effective fencing, however, can impede the movements of other wildlife and should be installed only after a professional wildlife assessment.

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